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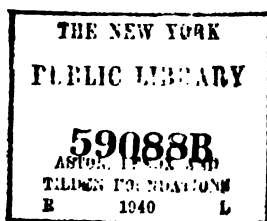
A Tale of
COLONIAL NEW YORK

By
E. RAYNER



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CHAPTER I

ANY one chancing to watch, on a certain night of the year 1701, the movements of a girl who threaded her way through a succession of narrow London alleys, would have said that she was bent on mischief. There was no doubt that she was shunning notice. Her footfall, as she emerged into a more open neighbourhood, suggested the stealthy tread of a prowling animal, and the eyes that peered into the darkness were keenly on the alert. The moon, as if with a view to gratifying the girl's evident desire for concealment, had sailed behind a roughly piled mountain of cloud, thick enough and extensive enough to intercept her rays for many minutes to come. And if that were not enough, a tall warehouse cast its shadow fairly across the street, and an archway held a denser darkness in its narrow entrance.

Here the girl stopped and listened, then drew into the friendly depths and waited. From the broader thoroughfare just beyond could be plainly heard the slow tread of the watchman as he shuffled nearer, with lantern and staff in hand. The ordinary sounds of the city were stilled. Even the shoeblack's shrill cry of "Clean your shoes!" had ceased. The night was too far advanced for the most carefully habited beau to trouble himself overmuch about the appearance of his high-heeled shoes, though they might be brought into sudden

contact with ankle-deep mud during their owner's uncertain progress homeward from some exhilarating form of evening entertainment.

The girl bent her head and listened — not to the oncoming step, but to other sounds in the distance of the city. Now and again they were borne upon the night air — far-away murmurs of loudly shouted scraps of songs, mingled with noisy bursts of laughter.

The footsteps of the watchman came nearer. The girl glided from her shelter, and reached the open thoroughfare as the light of his lantern fell across the side street.

"Father!"

The old man — for he was very old for the task he essayed — stopped suddenly.

"Is that you, Mary?" he said. "You'd be better in your bed."

"Nay, but I couldn't sleep. There are some of them about again."

"Aye, I know it. Young bloods like them have got nothing better to do. Pity 'tis they hadn't to earn their victuals by the sweat of their brows. Not a few of 'em would know a taste of hunger then."

"Come in here."

She drew him into the shelter she had lately left, and carefully screened the light of the lantern with her skirts.

"They're coming this way," she said. "They're nearer by a mile than when I listened first."

"Maybe they are."

He spoke wearily.

"You'll not try to stop 'em in their mischief?"

She peered into his face as she spoke, bringing her own so near that she almost touched him.

"Nay, girl. No fear! They're too plaguy strong and young for me to deal with. I'll away a bit further up the street, and turn me down into a spot I know well, as

good for hiding in as any other. And you, my girl, keep well out of sight. If they should lay hands on you —”

He grasped more tightly the long staff he carried, and for the moment the shuffling foot was set firmly down, and the wandering eye looked straight out across the circle of light flung by the lantern that by the last movement had been left unshaded.

“Hark! Yonder’s the constable.”

The girl’s quick ear had caught a sound that brought no message to the duller senses of the old man. He stood a moment staring at her as if bewildered, then snatched the lantern from her hand, and moved out into the roadway with a tremendous show of zeal, swinging his lantern manfully.

He felt himself between two fires. Behind him came the constable, with valiant tread, and tongue eloquently free in bringing home their deserts to such recreant guardians of the slumbers of peaceful citizens as were found neglecting their duties. Ahead of him—but still in the distance—he could hear the shouts of a band of young roisterers fresh from an evening’s carousal. The old man had not dodged such companies every night for nothing. He could have told, and did tell, when he was sure of his listener, what kind of sport these young rakes loved best. He had no mind to protect the property of citizens at the expense of a broken head, to say nothing of bruises and sword-cuts by way of variety. He knew his beat well, *very* well for his purpose, and there were only two or three stretches in its whole length in which a man could not find a conveniently dark hiding-place to creep into until the hilarious young townsmen were safely past. But the temper of the constable was an unknown quantity. He could be jovially lenient to the eccentricities of a homeward-bound pedestrian whose sense of direction was for the time in abeyance, always provided the traveller had not lost the power of

finding his way to the particular pocket in which his money reposed. And he had been known to be conveniently blind to defection on the part of the watchmen under his charge, though there were some who averred that such absence of astuteness could only be reckoned upon on occasions when the worthy constable scented danger to his own person. That his tongue could wag to some purpose under ordinary provocation every subordinate knew to his cost.

The sounds in the distance had become gradually clearer. The old man threw a nervous glance over his shoulder. His superior was still on the scene, though the stretch of roadway between the two had not materially diminished.

The watchman moved sullenly forward. He was uncomfortably aware that he had entered upon one of the sections of his beat along which convenient shelter was hard to find. Suddenly he stopped, hesitated for a single moment, and turned and ran at a pace which suited ill the legs that, between stiffness and fear, tottered painfully. The fact that the constable had disappeared made no very clear impression upon the old man's mind, though he observed the empty stretch of road, and the loneliness of the path within the posts, those barriers that held back the road-traffic lest it should infringe upon the pathway set aside for pedestrians.

For some minutes the shouts and songs had ceased, and there had been nothing to indicate the whereabouts of the revellers. Now, close at hand, scarcely beyond the point where the street turned, there arose a babel of sound. The rattle of a dozen canes, lead-tipped, upon a good oaken door, disturbed the slumbers of a householder, and before he could put forth his head from his window, if, indeed, he contemplated any such imprudence, his door-knocker was wrenched from its hold, and carried off as a trophy.

There came a momentary lull while one of the group took aim and sent a half-penny flying through a partially unprotected window. Instantly a clamour ensued, as a shower of half-pence came rattling upon the panes, and the fun waxed furious, till, between the falling of broken glass and the shouts of the company, there was clatter enough to render the night hideous.

Their work done, the roisterers passed on. The street was dark, for the moon had not yet cleared the cloud-bank. Since Michaelmas Day was past, and moreover the moon was near the full, there were two good reasons for leaving the lamps unlighted. The darkness of the roadway suited well the mood of the revellers, whose loud laughter at the helplessness of the populace, and congratulations upon their own prowess, filled up the interval between each mad sally.

"Ha! Who goes yonder? Here's ruin to the sneaking watchman!"

The cry reached the old man in his hastily chosen retreat. He tried to draw further back, squeezing himself flat against a wall.

"Where is he?" came from half a dozen throats.

"Crouching in yonder doorway. We'll root him out, and roast him after. Hi, watchman! What of the night?"

The derisive accents filled the old man with fear, and gave him a sickening realization of what he might expect at the hands of these young fashionables.

"Come out and face the music, coward! Sneaking won't avail you much."

The words were emphasized by the thrusting into the darkness of a naked sword, drawn from the cane of the speaker. The watchman deemed it wisest to come forth.

"What want you, young sirs?" he asked tremulously. "Go on your ways, and leave me in the discharge of my

duty, for full well you know I'm but an old man set to guard the slumbers of law-abiding citizens."

"And right well you guard 'em, on my faith!"

"That's to help remind you to stick to your post like a man."

The second speaker dealt the old watchman a ringing blow on the cheek with his open palm, and as he tried to escape, the rest closed round him and began in turn to buffet him.

The fun was going on apace, and no thought of interruption in this their most cherished form of amusement disturbed the minds of the youths, when there burst in upon them a lithe figure, that came out of the darkness with an impetus which brought it into their very midst before they suspected danger.

"What are ye after, ye cowards?"

A girl's ringing voice rose above the tumult. She stood in their midst, her eyes ablaze with anger and scorn.

"I give you joy, gentlemen, on your courage," she said, drawing herself up to her full height. "Right well you value a whole skin, that you pick out the oldest watchman of them all to test your valour on."

She stretched out her arm and pointed a finger at the old man, trembling and helpless, then turned it towards the youth whose hand was still uplifted to strike.

"He'd be a gallant worthy to fight with a cat, or, mayhap, better yet, a kitten," she said derisively. "I dare wager he'd run fast enough at the first touch of her claws."

For a moment the men were speechless, bewildered by the sudden onslaught. That the taunt was not wasted on him who held the watchman's arm was shown by the heightened flush on his cheek. He recovered quickly from his embarrassment.

"Ho, ho! What have we here?" he cried, as he snatched the lantern from the old man's nerveless fin-

gers, and held it close to the girl's face. "A beauty, by Jupiter!"

She stood the bold gaze unflinchingly, only her eyes sought those of the watchman, and her hand moved ever so slightly in the direction of the road. He understood the movement as a sign to him to flee, and with the instinct of self-preservation almost acted upon the suggestion. Then he shook his head decidedly, drew himself together, and advanced until his hand rested upon the girl's shoulder.

"Look you here, young sirs," he said. "You've naught to say to her. Let her go about her business, and settle the rest with me."

"Oh, we'll settle with you fast enough! No fear of that," laughed the man who held the lantern, and by way of illustrating his words he struck the old man a heavy blow with his clenched fist.

"Stop that, drunken brute that you are, or it'll be the worse for you!"

The girl's hand was raised as she spoke, and as it descended, five red streaks upon the face of the gallant bore witness to the sharpness of her finger-nails.

"Vixen! Tigress! You shall pay for this."

They closed about the two — the old man and the girl. The watchman forgot his fear and fought desperately, but as the company surged and swayed and pressed forward he was thrown to the ground, and, in the greater interest of wreaking their vengeance on the girl, the youths trampled him under foot, and left him bleeding and senseless where he had fallen, being intent only on tormenting their new victim. Right boldly she met their onslaught, but they were too many for her. She did not flinch at the thrusts of their sword-points, and it is possible it was her savage daring that won for her better treatment than others of her sex had received at their hands.

"Give the hussy a ride downhill. That's the kind of carriage for beauties of her stamp," suggested one of her tormentors.

"A hugely good suggestion, and one worth carrying out. She can scratch and claw as she's a mind to then."

"And here's the wherewithal to accomplish the business," announced another.

The speaker dashed across the road to where an empty barrel stood beneath the eaves of a house. Just below where they were the street dipped sharply down. It was a long, steep slope, well calculated to afford facilities for the carrying-out of their design. This would not be the first time that a woman had been inclosed in a barrel and rolled down the hill by such young miscreants as these. The girl stood, with gleaming eyes and baffled hatred, glaring at her captors, who had dragged her arms behind her, and were holding them with no merciful grip.

"The very thing, and in the nick of time. A blessing on your eyes for their sharpness!" cried he whom the girl had singled out for attack, and who was manifestly the leader of the party. "In with the wench. We'll give her a taste of a new pleasure."

"By the Lord Harry, that you shall not!"

The speaker, a young man a trifle more sober than his companions, drew his sword as he spoke.

"What words are these? Who says 'shall not' to me?" hotly demanded the knight of the five wounds.

"I do!" replied the other emphatically.

"And what have you to say to it?"

"This!" and his sword was thrust beneath the nose of the other.

"What mean you by that, a hanger-on like you? Better pay your debts, and leave my affairs alone."

"What is that you say?"

"'Pay your debts,' that's what I say; and, by all that's

holy, they *shall* be paid before yonder moon climbs high again, or you take the consequences!"

At that moment the moon outrode the clouds, and flooded the thoroughfare with light. It showed the blank dismay, the angry consternation, of the youth who still held his sword menacingly.

"You taunt me with what I owe you?" he questioned.

"I'll do more than that. I'll teach a beggar like you to beware how he interferes with a gentleman."

"You will? Take that!"

He dealt the other a blow in the face.

For the next few minutes there was a bewildering, mixed scuffle, in which swords and fists and sticks played about an equal part. Before it was ended the girl had disappeared, and the old watchman had been completely forgotten. Not one of the party saw the young fury bend over the blood-bedabbled face, and peer into it for signs of life. And nobody knew that she stooped and lifted the old man in her arms, half carrying, half dragging him into the shelter of a side alley. They were all too busy fighting and cursing one another. It is to be supposed that they came out of the fray equally well, — or ill, — for presently the group opened, and two of the combatants were led off by their friends, bleeding profusely. As for the watchman, whether he was dead or alive was a matter of small moment. Watchmen in that day were plentiful, and the flickering-out of one such life was of no moment to any except the girl who had thought the life worth fighting for.

CHAPTER II

“**F**OR goodness’ sake, sir, wake up! They’re like as not comin’ upstairs this blessed minute.”

The speaker, a red-headed, thick-limbed girl,—or child, for she looked little more,—spoke in a loud, excited whisper, putting her mouth almost to the ear of the sleeper.

“Wake up, I say! You ain’t got a mite o’ time to lose. The bailiff do be here.”

As if there were some potency in the last words, the young man stirred uneasily, the movement disclosing a bandaged arm, and blood-stains on the rumpled linen.

“Mercy on us, ye do sleep dreadful heavy! Rouse up, can’t ye? The bailiff’s after ye, for sure.”

In her eagerness she laid her hand on his shoulder. The sleeper opened his eyes for a moment, groaned, and became conscious that there was another world than that of dreams. He fixed his bewildered gaze on the squat figure of the girl. Then his senses slowly returned.

“What is it, Molly? Time to get up?”

“Mercy on us, sir, I wish it warn’t no more’n that! You ain’t heard a blessed word. There’s the bailiff a-wantin’ ye, and you sleepin’ as innocent as a babe.”

“The bailiff!”

“Aye, sir, the bailiff. And if ye don’t want to go with him, ye’ve got to look sharp.”

“Are you sure he wants me? Perchance some of the other lodgers —”

“He’s after you, as sure as death, sir. He was tellin’ it all to missis when I come upstairs. They didn’t know I listened, nor yet that I’d run up to warn ye.”

The young man stared at her blankly. His mind was

occupied with putting together certain circumstances that bore to one another the relation of cause and effect.

"Then he's been as good as his word, and it's all up with me," he said.

"No, it ain't. Not a bit of it," responded Molly. "Why, there's them that has dodged the bailiff for months, and never got took. You've got to dodge him, that's all."

"You don't understand, girl. It's not this one debt, it's what's behind. I'm in the clutches of a serpent that will squeeze the life-blood out of me."

He spoke tragically. In truth, he felt tragical. But tragedy was wasted on Molly.

"Hoot, sir! I think ye should know more than to give in like a baby," she said. "I'd never have thought ye'd take it this way. A young gentleman like you should have wit enough to get out of a scrape, as well as get in one. He ain't got ye yet. Time enough to say it's all up with ye when he's got his long, hungry fingers on ye."

Molly's face showed a mixture of indignation, anxiety, and kindly disapprobation, that, with the background of dirt that was never lacking, gave to the small maid a particularly ludicrous appearance. The comicalness of the situation was, however, entirely wasted upon the young man, who was too anxious about his own safety to give a thought to this servant lass who was putting herself to no small risk in his behalf.

"And how long will it be before his clutch is on me, girl?" he asked. "Such knaves know better than to let their prey escape. I shall feel the strength of his grip before I am well down the stairs."

"To be sure, sir," said Molly. "But you ain't goin' down the stairs, not till he's clear o' the place. You do jest as I tell ye, and that there bailiff may whistle for ye till he's tired. But you'd better hurry, sir, for if he

should come up here now, you'd be in a sad takin', and me too."

"Small chance of being in anything else, now he's after me. In all probability he's even now half-way up the stair," said the young man.

"Maybe, sir, and maybe not. Anyhow, there's a good strong door betwixt him and you, and the bolt's well drawn. For the rest, I'll listen."

Molly tiptoed to the end of the passage, and applied her ear to the crack of the door she had been discreet enough to bolt upon coming upstairs. She had succeeded in transferring a fair share of her anxiety to the young man, who was at that moment precipitately arraying himself in garments that would have been donned more quickly had it not been for the stiffness of his bandaged arm. The bewilderment of his sudden awakening had hardly yet worn off. Possibly the effect of a night's festivity had something to do with the throbbing head which refused to weigh calmly this unpleasantly critical situation. The only thing the youth fairly realized was that a debtor's prison stared him in the face, and that, once inside its walls, his residence there would not be of short duration. Through his bewildered brain darted words heard in the heat of conflict, sometime in the small hours of the night that was past:

"'Pay your debts,' that's what I say; and, by all that's holy, they *shall* be paid, or you take the consequences!"

These were the consequences.

His hands shook as he stooped to fasten on the high-heeled, buckled shoes. He had grown as nervously eager as was Molly herself. When that maiden returned she found him struggling to introduce his injured arm into the armhole of his long waistcoat.

"Here, you let me help ye with that, sir," she said. "They're talkin' downstairs as easy as can be. He's went out and got some beer, and they're drinkin' of it

comfortable. I heard missis tellin' of him you was sure to be dead asleep, 'cause you come in late, and had been spreein'."

"How do you propose to keep me out of that fellow's way?" asked the young man, when his toilet neared completion.

"Well, sir, 'tain't much of a place, to be sure, but it's mighty safe. There's a bit of a closet a-top o' the garret stairs. I sleep there, what time I get to sleep, which ain't much. It's three parts full o' rubbish. You could crawl in among that, and lay close, and he'd never find ye as long as he lived. I'll let ye know when he's gone."

"All right; go ahead. I'm ready," was the answer.

"This way, sir. My gracious! They're comin', sure enough!"

The girl darted out of the door, turned up a narrow passage, and stopped at the foot of a boxed-in staircase.

"This way, sir. Quick!"

The young man followed headlong. At the top of the stairs the girl stopped, pushed open a door, and further, pushed her charge inside, shutting him in before he could see where he was, and rushing down again. She was not a moment too soon. The bolt she had drawn was hardly pushed back before the door flew open, and she was confronted by her mistress. She had not to wait long for a greeting.

"What are you doin' here, you lazy young slut? Get about yer work, or I'll take some of the laziness out of ye in a way that I'll wager'll not be to yer taste."

"I am a-workin'. I don't never do nothin' else but work," retorted Molly sullenly, taking the precaution to move quickly out of reach of the woman's arm.

"You're an idle good-for-nothing, not worth the food you eat."

But Molly was already at the head of the stairs, down

which her footsteps were heard retreating. Any one who had listened might have counted just as many dull thuds as there were steps to descend, but any one who had watched would have seen that for every thud there was not a corresponding descent. When fairly out of sight in the curve of the staircase, the girl stopped, and while her feet rose and fell, her sharp ears were busy noting the movements of the bailiff and his escort. She heard her mistress expatiating loudly on the trials of a landlady's lot.

"It's the life of a galley slave, and nothin' to show for it," said that lady. "Now there's this young —"

"By all that's holy, the bird's flown!"

The bailiff had entered the room while the good woman was yet engrossed by her own eloquence.

"Gone? Not he! You must be pretty well foxed if you can't see him a-layin' in his bed. He come in that late it was near mornin', and he never — Mercy on us! He ain't there!"

She had pushed past the bailiff, and stood looking at the empty bed. The bailiff stared at the landlady, and the landlady stared at the bailiff.

"That's a pretty go!"

"When did he get out? That's what I want to know," said the landlady.

The bailiff went slowly round the room, and examined all possible hiding-places.

"Wherever he is now, this don't happen to be the place," he remarked oracularly.

Suddenly the landlady strode through the door.

"Mol-ly!"

That damsel began to beat a noiseless retreat kitchenward.

"Moll!"

Still Molly was discreetly silent.

"Drat the girl! Mo-ol-ly!"

From the depths of the kitchen proceeded a muffled
"Yes, mum."

"Are you deaf, I should like to know? Come up here."

Molly slowly tramped up the stairs.

"Where's Mr. Nevard? He ain't in his bed."

"No, mum, an' he ain't been there these hours. He was up afore six this mornin', lookin' more like a spook than the young gentleman he is."

"Young gentleman, forsooth! Young beggar, more like. Why didn't you tell me he was gone? Where's my money comin' from, I should like to know, and him owin' me six weeks if he owes a day?"

Having no information to impart on this score, Molly was silent.

"Why didn't you tell me? Answer me that."

The woman clutched the girl by the shoulder as she spoke.

"'Cause I didn't know as ye wanted to be told. They all comes and goes as they likes. 'Tain't my place to stop 'em."

"When did you say this young spark went?" asked the bailiff.

"Six o'clock this mornin'. I'd jest undone the door to clean the steps. There was a gentleman come for him in a hackney coach, and he run upstairs and woke him up, and they went off together."

"And you hadn't no more sense than to let him go that way?" said the landlady. "Just like a good-for-nothing piece like you."

Molly stolidly surveyed her grimy red fingers.

The landlady and the bailiff made a second inspection of the lodger's room, and having satisfied themselves that he was not hidden in any crevice or corner of the same, proceeded to retrace their steps, the emissary of the law suggesting that another pot of beer might do something

towards rendering the situation less irksome during the hours of waiting.

Meanwhile, in the depths of Molly's closet, the object of their solicitude crouched among the rubbish, to the serious damage of his light silk stockings. He had time now to collect his scattered senses, and look the situation in the face. He was well aware that the sum the bailiff had come to collect was not in itself particularly large, but if what he suspected was true, the hand that had closed about him in this case was only holding him for a season, to gain time for a tighter grip. The pursuit of revenge, once begun, is apt to prove an engrossing pastime, and the young debtor was uncomfortably certain that he knew his man, and had little mercy to expect from him.

"I was a fool, a stupid fool, to meddle with his pleasures," he muttered. "The girl was nothing to me, yet it was a crying shame to treat so scurvily as handsome a wench as yon."

Then he fell to musing over his probable fate, and between present discomfort and visions of prospective incarceration, the time passed but slowly. Fears of being discovered in his undignified position, and ignominiously exposed, added to his impatience, and he had almost made up his mind to tempt fate by endeavouring to escape, when he heard a stealthy step upon the stair.

"Are you all right, sir?" asked Molly, opening the door far enough to insert her head.

"Right?" retorted the young man. "There's precious little chance of anything right in this business. Might as well end it first as last, without any of this foolery. It'll come to the same thing in any case."

"Very well, sir," said Molly bluntly. "Jest as it pleases ye. Maybe ye've money enough to pay this cove that's waitin' for ye downstairs, and it don't make no difference to you how soon he finds ye."

"If I had, you may wager I'd not be long in this position," replied the young man bitterly.

"Then, sir," said Molly earnestly, "don't you be thinkin' of puttin' yerself nowhere near that bailiff. Don't I know jest what it means? There's my uncle got took twenty-three years ago come June, long afore I was born, and ain't out yet, nor like to be. And what did he owe at the beginnin'? A paltry five shillin's, and no more, but it's more pounds to-day than he'll ever see in all his born days. There's only one way out for him, and that's through a precious narrow gate. Don't you be a fool, sir. Keep out o' that feller's way, if ye hev to stop here till the middle o' the night."

"Where's the fellow sitting?" asked the young man sharply.

"In the front room, where he can keep an eye on the entry and the street. You couldn't —"

"Couldn't what?"

"Look here, sir," said Molly, dropping her voice to a low whisper, "if you'd a mind to crawl through the coal-hole, you could get out at the back side o' the yard. The missis is in the kitchen, and neither she nor him couldn't spy ye there. You've got to turn sharp at the foot o' the stairs, and pop right into the coal-hole. He can't see ye if ye don't go a step further'n the last stair."

"Then the coal-hole let it be," said the young man, and as a result of the decision, a youth, liberally smirched with coal-dust, with a wig very much awry, and unmistakable marks of disorder about his whole person, emerged from the privacy of a back yard, and was glad to hide himself in a sedan-chair, and be borne away from present danger by two lusty porters.

CHAPTER III

“OH! It’s you, Fulke, is it? What, in the name of all that’s ridiculous, brings you here at this hour of the day? And, pray, have you been fighting with a coal-barge?”

It was not altogether an inappropriate greeting for a young man whose last experience had been that of crawling through a coal-cellar.

Fulke Nevard tried to look unconcerned, and failed dismally. The day had already seemed wretchedly long to him, but he was aware, when he paid the chairmen, and ran upstairs to his friend’s room, that it was still unfashionably early for a man of pretension to be abroad. The young beau he had come to see was yet in his bed, daintily sipping chocolate, and looking over a letter or two which had arrived by way of that convenient institution established in the behalf of dwellers in the metropolis — the London penny post.

“Any news?” asked the young man languidly.

“News enough for me, more’s the pity,” was the answer. “Wyville’s been as good as his word.”

“About — Oh, I understand! Had he taken any legal steps against you?”

“No; but Matthews, the peruke-maker, had, and Wyville was to lend me thirty pounds to pay him with. Now, of course, he has given the rascally fellow a hint to come down on me, and the consequence is, I’m wanted.”

“Ah! Uncomfortable for you. Can’t you raise it?”

“Not in the world. I’ve borrowed of everybody that would lend me so much as a pound. Wyville’s been advancing for me this year or more, curse him. Better have let it come sooner, when I was not so deep in.”

"You owe Wyville a good round sum?" questioned the other, leisurely beginning that most important business of the day — the making of his toilet.

"Goodness knows what I owe him; I don't."

Fulke Nevard turned to stare gloomily out of the window, while his companion proceeded to draw carefully over his knee a long rolling silk stocking of softest blue, graced with clock of silver. He critically surveyed the shapely leg, and the effect of the stocking upon it, before he spoke again.

"Pity you hadn't kept that little debt in your mind before you stopped Wyville's game last night," he remarked, smoothing out a wrinkle, and holding up the stocking's mate.

Fulke tapped impatiently upon the window-pane.

"Of course I was a fool," he said testily.

"Y-es," drawled his friend, in a moment of abstraction caused by the effort to make the second stocking roll equally well with the first.

"Vastly prompt of Wyville to put Matthews on you so soon," he remarked, after a long silence. "I'll wager he'll not stop at this."

"He'll not stop at anything short of the worst he can do," responded Fulke savagely.

"The wench wasn't worth the risk," commented the other, giving the subject the fag end of his attention. The major part was engrossed by the effort to arrange in becoming creases the fine lawn sleeves that puffed out below his large coat-cuffs. He stopped a moment to survey the droop of the lace frill over his hand. Fulke watched his movements impatiently.

"Wyville's a brute!" he broke out with at last.

"He's a rich brute, then, and a savage brute, when he's roused. What are you going to do?"

"Rot in prison, I suppose."

"Not a prodigiously pleasant prospect. Confound

this cravat! My fingers are slow to get the go of the latest turn. Does it hang passably, think you?"

Fulke cast a scornful glance at the bit of point lace the other was attempting to adjust after the most approved style. Just now lace-edged cravats were little to his taste.

"It is surely becoming ravelled at the ends, after the pretty penny it cost me," lamented the beau. "And the only other I possess is in a worse way. You will at least have no care about your apparel, Fulke, when you are secluded from the world."

"You might show a little friendliness, and help me out," said Fulke savagely.

"With all my heart. But what can I do?"

"Go and talk things over with Wyville. Find out whether he really means mischief. But for heaven's sake don't give him a hint I'm here. If you do, it's all up with me."

"I'll be silent as the grave. But split me if I think it'll be a bit of use. Wyville's a very brute to hang on when he takes a notion. Still, I'll hasten to see him, and if anything can be done for you, you may rest assured the case could not be in better hands."

The speaker dallied long with the sleeve knot he was tying, stopped to assure himself that his sword hung low upon his thigh, and gave a last admiring glance at the gay shoulder knot, before he tucked his cocked hat under his arm, and waved a studied adieu with the hand that held his lace-fringed gloves.

Left to his own devices, Fulke Nevard betook himself to the depressing occupation of seeking a way through his difficulties. The young man whom — in a fit of generosity towards a stranger — he had antagonized the night before, was the leader of the set Fulke most affected, occupying that position partly by reason of the wealth which gave him an advantage over his more needy

associates, and partly by an arrogant boldness of character, which made him foremost in every reckless deed. To this young man Fulke Nevard stood indebted, how deeply he hardly dared to reckon. Wyville was no niggard, and his advances to his friend had helped the latter out of more than one uncomfortable position.

Of his own legitimate resources the young man found it a very short matter to take account. He simply had no income but that derived from his practice as assistant to a semi-fashionable doctor, and, with his style of living, it fell far short of meeting expenses. Diamond buckles, and flowing periwigs, to say nothing of cravats edged with point lace a quarter of a yard in width, were items of expenditure that called for a liberal income. And the income of Fulke Nevard was not likely to be liberal for many years to come.

Under these circumstances he could ill afford to quarrel with Wyville, and as he looked at his own bandaged wrist, he thought ruefully of the savage sword-thrust he had given that youth, and felt convinced he would have his revenge for every pang it cost him. He was in no wise reassured by the return, some hours later, of the friend he had dispatched to sound the depths of Wyville's wrath.

"On my faith, I'm sorry for you," were the words with which he was greeted, while the speaker crossed the floor with affected slowness, and dropped in a graceful attitude upon a chair. "For myself, I'm undone. This beastly rain has played the mischief with my peruke, and as for these shoes — look at them!"

He held the spattered footgear forward.

Fulke glanced towards the window. Absorbed in his own thoughts, he had not noticed the thickening of the clouds, and the sorry condition of his host's apparel was to him the first intimation of the shower. Now, brought back suddenly to a sense of existing conditions, he sur-

veyed without a trace of mirth the light silk stockings, liberally splashed with London mud, that mixture of abominable ingredients the true nature of which it was best not to dwell upon. From thence his eye travelled upwards to the peruke, that, in a state of lank collapse, gave little sign of the glory of tightly curling flaxen locks that had bedecked their owner's shoulders a short time before. The heavy spring shower had reduced the hair to its original straightness, and the wearer to a state of desperation.

"It's hugely annoying to be served this way," he grumbled; "and not a hackney coach nor a chair to be had for love or money."

He did not find it necessary to add that of the latter he had not much to offer.

"I was near enough to home to be in a fair way to beat the rain," he continued. "But the storm came on apace, and now I'm all spent, and no end of mischief done."

"And Wyville? Did you see him?" asked Fulke.

"I saw him, surely," said the other, ruefully surveying the damage to the wig he had removed from his head, "and I spent much time in friendly converse with him. As a result of my observations I may tell you that Wyville of Wyville is no soft enemy."

Fulke made an impatient gesture.

"He says he'll see you rot in prison, and, so far from helping you out, he'll run up every expense those rascals of the law can invent, to make your case the worse. He calls you an ungrateful beggar, and curses every one who has a word to say to you. I warn you, in a friendly way, that you may expect a little coolness from your acquaintances in consequence. Wyville's enmity is not a thing to be lightly incurred, even for a friend."

"Pity you came out on the wrong side," said Fulke bitterly.

"Oh, as to that, I was in no danger," replied the other, with cool effrontery. "I could ill afford to make a foe when a little well-timed abuse of a fool would earn me a friend. I could but call you all the villains I could twist my tongue to, and, by all that's holy, if you're not a scoundrel you're a fool, to cut up as mad a caper as that of last night. So it made no great odds to give you your due out of one measure instead of the other."

Fulke winced at the unpleasant candour, but he could not afford to be offended.

"Will he carry out his threat, do you think?" he asked.

"Will he? Will the tiger spring on his prey? I tell you Wyville's dead in earnest."

"Then it's all up with me," said Fulke desperately.

"Something very like it, unless you can raise the full amount you owe him. Wish I could help you, but, on my faith, I'm in near as bad a taking myself."

He was interrupted by a heavy rap at the door, and Fulke, with a hurried warning to his friend on no account to betray his presence, retreated into a small inner room, and listened breathlessly. He was so certain the intruder was a bailiff, and the moment of his capture at hand, that the first words were not enough to reassure him.

"The maid below asserted that a doctor was to be found here, and in truth I stand in need of one," said the stranger.

"For what purpose?" Fulke heard his host inquire.

"That he may bind up my head, knocked to pieces in a row with a rascally porter."

The speaker came forward into the light, and removed his finger from the edges of a broad, gaping wound upon his forehead.

"Fulke, here's work for you, and maybe the chance

of making money by it," called the young man. "No mischief lurking here. It's an honest wound," he added, as he led the stranger to the door of the inner room.

They stood for a moment surveying each other. The stranger spoke first.

"You are a doctor, sir?"

"Men call me so," was the answer.

"Then I'll place my battered head in your hands, though, by the look of things, I should say your need was equal to my own," he said, looking significantly at the young doctor's bandaged arm.

Fulke paid no heed to the insinuation, but with fingers remarkably deft, when his own disabled condition was taken into account, proceeded to attend to the injured forehead. The patient, a man older by ten years than the operator, watched his movements closely.

"You've more on your mind than the care of a broken head and a bandaged arm," he said at length.

"And pray, sir, what may it concern any but myself how much or how little I have on my mind?" asked the young doctor coldly.

"Surely it concerns them not at all; but one who has seen his fellows under many aspects learns to look beneath the surface. I have no wish to intermeddle with the concerns of any."

The young doctor looked at him sharply, tightened the hastily improvised bandage, and then looked again.

"If you have seen much of the world," he said, "you have learned that there are fools enough in it."

"And you would imply that I have but now met with another?"

It may have been due to some magnetism in the stranger's personality, or it may have been owing to the desperate nature of Fulke's circumstances, but it was not many minutes before the young doctor was found

unburdening himself to his new patient, and explaining to him the cause of his anxiety. An hour passed while yet the two were in close confab, and when at last the elder rose to go he said:

“If you think best to give it a trial, send a letter to me at the coffee-house called Lloyd’s.”

CHAPTER IV

THE whole village had turned out, from Lady Betty and Sir Julian, of the Great House, to the old dame who had seen every wedding in the place for nigh upon a century. A straggling line of watchers dotted the broad road all the way from a certain picturesque dwelling standing back among the trees, to the door of the church itself. Literally all the way, for one or two of the rustics, a little bolder than their neighbours, had stationed themselves in the broad avenue beyond the great gates, eager to be the first to give notice of the coming of the bridal pair. Of these, the nearest to the door itself was a sturdy youth, whose red-striped breeches and frieze coat were manifestly gala attire. His self-satisfied glances, first at his own person and then at the closed door, revealed the fact that he stood in closer relationship to the principal actors in to-day's scenes than did the majority of the villagers. There was an air of superiority in the majestic wave of the hand with which he motioned the nearest rustic to keep at a more respectful distance from the house. The superiority was plainly unquestioned, for the intruder fell back to a position closer to the outside world, and the ruddy-faced youth was left to enjoy his honours alone. As the apprentice and right-hand man of the village carpenter, he was fairly entitled to the distinction of being the first to raise the cry of "Here they be!" Since the rising of the sun he had been the busiest man in Eastenholme, as the long white trail from the gates to the church bore witness. Crisp and clean and sweet-scented was that bridal path, and no hands but those of the carpenter's sturdy assistant had

helped in its making. Its foundation was the well-trodden footway that skirted the road through the village, and that now, in its altered condition, was a source of much temptation to the juvenile element among the watchers.

"Keep off o' that path, can't ye?" and "Git off there, you young varmint! How dare ye set foot on them shavin's?" were now and again the gentle admonishings of some village dame, as an adventurous youngster essayed to test the character of the path of honour.

"Drat the young beggar! Come off, I tell ye!" screeched an excited matron, springing forward to bestow a well-aimed cuff upon the cheek of a small boy, and succeeding so well that she landed him sprawling in the midst of the thick, soft shavings upon which he had ventured to set his presumptuous feet.

"Look a-there what you've done!" she added, as she lifted the youngster by one arm, and deposited him, with a warning shake, well out on the road. "Look at that path! And them shavin's fresh and clean from his own workshop!"

Clean and fresh they certainly were, and so thickly spread as to suggest an abundant source of supply. It might well be abundant, for it had long been accumulating for this very occasion.

"I'll give her a road to walk on that's fit for a carpenter's bride," worthy John Arkwright had declared. "It'd be none too good for Joan, though I should pile it a foot high."

And with Joan in his mind the village carpenter had stored up his shavings, that the local custom, long observed in that Kentish village, of strewing the path from the house to the church with the symbols of the bridegroom's calling, might in his case be not only appropriate, but pretty enough and pleasant enough to be worthy of his bride. For John had waited long for Joan, and

his joy when the time of waiting was ended was in proportion to the length of his probation. And so the long white path shone under the April sunshine, and a sweet smell of pine shavings filled the air, while the villagers commented on the prodigality of the preparations, and the personal characteristics of the carpenter and his bride.

Meanwhile, within the house the last touches were being put to the bridal attire. The young maiden who acted as tirewoman had a pretty flush on her cheeks, as she arrayed the bride in clothing a little too delicate and costly to have been of that good woman's own devising or purchasing.

"There! He who will not wish John well of such a bride is not fit to gain a glimpse of you to-day," she said, bending her head a very little to kiss the cheek that was turned towards her.

"Joan," she added, "it is foolish, I know, but I'm truly jealous of John. I feel as if he were robbing me of you."

"Nay, Miss Aveline, that he never would, nor should. He has waited over-long for me now, but he'd have waited longer if there'd been any question of doing aught for you or the master that's gone — bless him."

She laid her hand caressingly on the girl's shoulder, and a look of anxiety crossed her face.

"Now John will have reason to be jealous," said the girl, with an attempt at playfulness.

"Not he. He knows better, and if he didn't, he'd soon learn his place. You and the master have stood first always, and are like to — leastways, you are. There's no more we can any of us do for him. But don't you never think there's anybody, not even John himself, that's going to be thought of before you."

She stood for a moment looking straight into the girl's eyes, her own soft with tenderness, for it was many

years since, as a little child, this maiden had crept into Joan's heart.

"There, now," cried the girl, suddenly changing her tone, "your last chance has come! Take one good long look at yourself in the glass. I am going to fasten on this knot of ribbon, and verily it is the last finishing touch to the bridal costume. Look well at your charms, for, after it is in place, woe to you if you cast so much as a glance towards the mirror. For well you know that the bride who looks upon herself when her attire is complete is tempting ill-luck to dog her steps."

What bride could help looking, and, at the sight, how could this particular bride help smiling? She made a pleasing picture, standing before the quaint old mirror, for John was not wrong in boasting that he was to wed as handsome a woman as Eastenholme could furnish. A well-built, comely woman, straight and strong, was Joan, fit mate for the carpenter whose honest industry had enabled him to prepare for her a home a little better than the average home of the village.

"John has need to call himself a fortunate man to-day," said Aveline, as, the last ribbon fastened in place, she carefully stepped between Joan and the glass, that the ill-luck of viewing her own person when every preparation was complete might not follow the bride.

And so John thought, and the villagers said, as the pair walked, with many a conscious glance, along the path to church, where Aveline herself acted as bridesmaid, and Lady Betty and Sir Julian were the first to greet the bride when the ceremony was ended.

Later in the day the house within the big gates was thrown open wide, and sounds of merriment reached the road, where a horseman drew rein to listen. He was hidden from view by a clump of trees, and as the sounds continued he turned his horse's head and rode back to where a narrow lane opened into the highway. There

was laughter and good cheer up there at the house, but apparently he did not wish to share in them, nor was he particularly pleased at their presence. In truth, it was the first time that the house had opened its doors to the Eastenholme world since the day its master was carried from its shelter. It was for this reason that John had waited for his bride: first, that she might perform the last duties for her master; and then, that no unseemly haste might savour of want of respect for his memory.

But thoughts of sorrow seemed far from the dwelling to-day, as men and maids, the swains and rustic beauties of the village, ranged themselves for a contest they would have been sorry to have omitted on such an occasion as this. The least-encumbered space—the big broad hall—was resorted to as the most suitable spot for the carrying-out of this important part of the wedding revels, and, as a preliminary step, the married men and women, with much joking at the expense of the younger members of the company, dropped out of the ranks. There was a stir and flutter among the maidens, and a little shy nudging on the part of the bachelors, while they ranged themselves on opposite sides for the deciding of that all-important question, who amongst the girls should be the next to be called a bride, to be followed immediately after by the pointing out of the lucky youth who, of all the strong-armed, stout-built lads, would first buy a wedding-ring and take to himself a wife.

“Miss Aveline! Where’s Miss Aveline?” called a daring swain.

“Yes, yes, Miss Aveline, you’ve got to come, too!” exclaimed the girls, as Aveline appeared, holding in her hand a shoe that had more than once seen service on her own little foot.

It was of white kid, goloshed with black velvet, and was clogged to keep the delicate upper from the ground.

That clog — a straight strip of sole-leather, passing under the heel, and fastened in at the toe between the sole and the upper — did not make the shoe a particularly convenient thing to walk with, but it had its use on a muddy road. Now the shoe was held aloft, to be seized by the carpenter's apprentice himself.

"Now, then, maids! All ready?" he asked.

"No, no! Not till Miss Aveline takes her place," was the general cry, and Aveline stepped to a vacant spot in the middle of the row of girls.

"Now, here goes! One, two, three!"

Away sped the shoe, falling nowhere within the hall, but spinning through the open door as far as the strong arm of the youth could throw it. Then there was a rush and a scuffle as each girl tried to possess herself of the coveted shoe, for she who should secure it might look to be the first of the bevy to become a happy bride. What a commotion there was as the village lasses sought high and low for the treasure!

Meanwhile Aveline disengaged herself from the throng. She thought she had seen a gleam of white over in a clump of lilacs upon the edge of the old-fashioned garden. To reach the spot unseen she stepped behind the shrubs into a pathway just below the tall hedge. She did not chance to lift her eyes, or she would have seen the head of a horseman appearing above the greenery. For a moment the rider watched her as she stooped and peered through the bushes. Then he spoke.

"Aveline!" he said softly. She started and turned round.

"Fulke! I'm so glad. When —"

"Hush! Don't bring all that noisy crew on top of me," he said. "What are they doing, rioting over the place like this?"

The light died from the girl's face, and a look of

disappointment, not unmingled with reproach, took its place.

"Why, you must know that this is Joan's wedding-day. I told you about it not a month ago, when I last wrote to you," she said.

"Ah, yes! I remember, though it had slipped my mind. But what has that to do with all this commotion? Couldn't John wed Joan in a quiet way, instead of turning the place upside down, or, if they must needs rampage, could no other spot be found for their revels?"

"Fulke, how can you?" said the girl indignantly. "Do you think I would let Joan be wedded from any other house than this? Hasn't she been here ever since she was a young girl, so that it is almost as much her home as it is mine? I believe she loves it nearly as well as I do myself."

The young man turned his head away, and a deeper shadow crossed his face.

"You girls make so much fuss about such things," he said. "Of course I know Joan has been a faithful servant, but as long as she was safely married, it could make but little difference whether she started from one spot or another to have the knot tied. For the matter of that, you yourself could soon learn to love another place as well as this."

He spoke with evident constraint. If Aveline could have seen the hand that held the reins, she would have noticed that it trembled. Fulke Nevard was not much given to nervousness, but there was more trepidation than assurance in his movements just then. It was so far from easy for him to look into his sister's eyes, that he did not even attempt it.

"Fulke, there is something wrong," she said, ignoring his last speech.

Her brother sat in gloomy silence, looking down at his horse.

"What is it?" asked the girl anxiously.

"What is it?" he repeated, in a tone of suppressed passion. "Nothing, only I am the most unfortunate wretch on the face of the earth. And that matters little to any but me, I suppose."

"Oh, Fulke, you know that is not true!" said the girl, the tears starting to her eyes. "But you are tired and worried, and — Why, you are wounded!"

For he had raised his arm, not the one that guided the horse, and the girl had caught a momentary glimpse of a blood-stain upon the sleeve.

"Oh, this wretched scratch has broken out bleeding again!" he said.

Then Aveline forgot her indignation, and her heart found reason and excuse for the young man's irritation.

"Come into the house," she said pityingly, "and I will send one of the lads to attend to your horse. You were not fit to ride."

"You will do nothing of the sort," said Fulke. "Go back to your games, and leave me to see to the animal myself. I tell you I will not have that set staring at me. I'll slip in by the side door, and keep quiet till their sport is over; but go you back to the rest, or they'll be seeking you here."

Then, as she turned to leave him, he leant over the hedge.

"Aveline, I'm a desperate man," he said. "I've no heart for revels, and no tongue for smooth words. Go, like a good girl, and keep the coast clear."

And Aveline, her heart oppressed by a weight she did not understand, sought her guests, and tried to laugh and be gay while the blushing, satisfied maiden who had gained possession of the shoe tossed it back into the ranks of the waiting youths, and a scuffle, less prolonged,

if more vigorous, than the last, gave it into the keeping of the lad destined by force of arm to possess it and the promise it brought. But the girl's thoughts were not following her eyes, for all the time she was listening for the sound of her brother's step, and trying to quiet her fears as she recalled his excited tones, and thought of the great red stain.

CHAPTER V

"FULKE, there is something dreadful the matter!" Aveline laid her hand tenderly on her brother's arm.

"That?" he said, in a hard, dry tone. "'Tis nothing. A sword-thrust, a mere scratch. I rode hard, or it would not have bled again."

"But it ought to be attended to," said Aveline anxiously.

"As you will. It has grown stiff."

He began slowly to undo the bandage, and Aveline ran to fetch fresh linen. When she returned she found her place usurped by Joan.

"That's right, Miss Aveline. It needs new bandages sadly. It's not easy to look at that wound and believe that Mr. Fulke is a doctor," said the woman bluntly.

She replaced the linen with a skill that told of long practice in that very necessary art. The young man submitted his arm to her, scarcely bestowing a glance upon the wound.

"And how came you by so ugly a thrust, sir?" asked Joan, as she smoothed and secured the bandage.

"Oh! a little altercation with a companion. It was nothing," said the young man, in a tone that was meant to be repressive.

Joan lingered. She was not satisfied. She had not tended these two from childhood without knowing well the signs of disturbance.

"Will you sleep here to-night, sir, or go up to the House with Miss Aveline?" she asked.

"Oh! I'll stay here. I've no mind for one of Sir Julian's lectures."

A shade of annoyance crossed his face the moment the words were uttered. They were too near the truth to be exactly what he desired to say.

Joan departed, and Aveline hovered round her brother.

"Have you had anything to eat? You must be —"

"Nay, I dined at an inn, and was never in less need of food," said the young man irritably.

Because he had much to say, he found it particularly hard to speak, and grew more nervously impatient as he discovered that certain carefully prepared arguments were growing momentarily less convincing, as he viewed them in the light of his present surroundings.

"Fulke, what is it?"

Aveline had been studying his face ever since Joan went away.

"Ruin," said Fulke shortly.

"Is it money? Couldn't I help you? I have a little left, and we have found a tenant for the house. That will bring more."

"Yes, you can help prodigiously if you can get up five or six hundred pounds before night," said Fulke bitterly.

"Five or six hundred pounds?"

"Exactly so. And if not, you can have the pleasure of bidding good-by to your brother forever, for it's a life sentence."

Aveline turned pale.

"Fulke, what do you mean?" she said.

"I mean that a very fiend has his clutches on me; and if he gain his will — and heaven knows what's to hinder — he will never rest till he sees me in a pauper's grave."

"But — why should he? Who is it? What does he want?"

"Who is it? Wyville of Wyville. And he wants revenge, and will have it too. Trust him for that."

Aveline glanced at the wounded arm. Instinctively she associated the sword-thrust with this desire for revenge, and the tangible evidence of danger gave force to her brother's words.

"Aye," he said, interpreting the look, "it's the mark of his sword, but I doubt I gave him a worse prick, more's the pity."

Bit by bit she heard the story; that is to say, as much of it as Fulke felt it expedient to impart. There were many reservations quite necessary when a man was talking to his sister. Aveline followed the recital breathlessly.

"How did you get away?" she asked, when the tale was told.

"Sneaked off like a thief, before the city was awake."

"And now? Couldn't you stay here? You would be safe then."

"For how long, I pray you? I would give a good bit to discover the spot in England where I should be safe from Wyville's pursuit. He will move heaven and earth to be revenged, and he knows the locality of this place about as well as I do myself. I should not be surprised to see a bailiff walk in at this moment."

Aveline glanced apprehensively towards the open window. Fulke laughed — a harsh, mirthless laugh.

"Don't, Fulke," said the girl hastily. "You behave as if nobody cared."

"And for the matter of that, who does care?" asked the young man.

"I do. You know I do."

Her brother shrugged his shoulders, but made no other answer. She laid her hand on his.

"There's nobody but us two now," she said.

"Very true," he answered, letting the words come slowly. "Only us two, but how much does that mean to you? What would you do to save me from a life

worse than death? Nothing! There," he added, half relenting when he met her reproachful look, "I've no doubt I'm a brute, but I'm desperate, and to me it seems —"

"Yes," said Aveline quietly, "it seems —"

"That real love would not stop to weigh a brother's life against — even a place like this."

He gave a long, comprehensive glance, that took in house and garden and surroundings. Aveline's eyes were fixed on his face. Her cheek had lost every trace of colour. Even her lips had grown white.

"Which means — what?" she said.

"Who said it meant anything? Yes, if you will have it, it means that there is more sisterly kindness in a little real help than in many a mouthful of sympathy."

Aveline winced, but her steady gaze did not relax.

"What would you propose in the place of the sympathy?" she asked; but while she said the words she knew what the answer would be.

He turned upon her eagerly.

"Aveline, you *could* help me. There *is* a way. And it would not be so very hard, if you could only think it."

That steady gaze continued. It disconcerted him. He moved uneasily.

"This place, now," he continued. "It is yours, of course. I don't deny your right to it."

"No?"

He had stopped, as if for an answer.

"Aveline, this place would save me."

There was no response.

"And you should not lose by it. Not a penny. In fact, you would gain. It is really as much for your good as for my own. But of course you cannot see it so now. But you can see that it would save me."

The last words were spoken pleadingly.

"Yes — I see."

She understood his meaning perfectly. She had known all along to what he was coming, but the extent of his demand was growing more clearly apparent.

"I know you love the place," continued the young man eagerly. "And so, for the matter of that, do I. It's a fine old place, and it's a thousand pities to part with it, but I'm not asking you to let it go for nothing. The plan I would propose would make you the richer instead of the poorer, and —"

"The richer, when the home *he* loved belonged to strangers?"

The girl's tones were very low and distinct. As for her eyes, they had never swerved from their steady scrutiny of her brother's face. He grew irritable beneath the gaze.

"I did not ask you to let it go to strangers," he said. "I don't know that I ever attempted to open the subject. I wasn't such a fool as not to know that your love for the place was greater than —"

He hesitated to finish the sentence.

"Was greater than my love for you," said Aveline quietly.

"Yes," cried Fulke passionately. "It *is* greater. You set a higher value on the stone and mortar of this old house than you do on my life. I doubt not you are right. One is of infinitely more profit to you than the other."

He broke off abruptly. The silence that followed was unbroken by any movement on his sister's part. She sat looking fixedly at him, as if waiting for his next remark.

"I was a fool to enter upon the subject at all," he resumed. "You asked me whether there was anything you could do. Heavens! Did you think a few soft words could avail in a strait like mine?"

"And as for letting the place go to a stranger," he

continued, cooling down under the influence of the dead silence that followed his last words, and possibly influenced by a quick glance he cast in Aveline's direction, "there is no earthly reason why it should ever do that. Sir Julian will be glad enough to have it. But if there were, I know not why your feelings should be further hurt, since it is to be in the hands of strangers in any case. It was but now you told me a tenant had been found for it."

"True," said Aveline. "I have regretted much that it should be so. Fulke, does it really seem nothing to you that careless hands will touch the things *he* loved? To me the necessity is a sorrow, but Uncle Julian says the place must not be unused, and truly it is the only way in which I can feel myself independent. I know father wished me to be that."

What made the young man rise and walk hastily to the window? He was silent for some minutes, but over the face that he kept persistently turned to the landscape without there came signs of a conflict. He turned round suddenly.

"There's no hope and no help for a fellow when once he gets into trouble," he said hoarsely. "Every step he takes to drag himself out but plunges him deeper in the mire. Thank goodness, you're a girl, and have no temptation to be anything but exemplary. For me, I'm undone. I give up the struggle. There's no way out; I fancied there might be."

He sank into his old seat, and dropped his head in his hands. He had come here clinging desperately to a hope that in his heart he knew had but a slender foundation. He had put that hope between him and ruin. At this moment there was forced upon him the conviction that it was possible for the alternative to be a little less desirable than the ruin he dreaded, that the turning of his hope into a certainty might be more

of a calamity than a blessing. His despair did more for him than all his hot words.

"Don't, Fulke, dear. It is not true that there is no way out."

Aveline's hand was on his shoulder. The hardness had gone from her face. If her brother had looked up he would have seen that her lips trembled.

"I suppose a man ought to have the courage to face destruction when he has been fool enough to court it," said Fulke, without raising his head.

"Perhaps he ought," said the girl, with honest candour, "but it might be easier to look for a way out. Tell me your plan. Though you give me but a hard character, it may possibly be found that you have done me scant justice."

Fulke lifted his head and looked at her.

"Better not ask it," he said. "I am a sorry coward, I fear, and the very suggestion of deliverance makes me wild enough to forget everything but my own need. And yet, in very truth, I thought I could see a great gain to you in the move."

His face had begun to grow eager again. Already his carefully prepared arguments were gaining the mastery over the brief impulse towards a self-abnegation that had its origin in an unwonted upspringing of the sense of justice towards another.

"What is it you were going to propose?"

He looked at her irresolutely for a moment, and then the words broke forth hurriedly.

"I know it seems impossible to you that I should succeed at anything," he said. "I have been unlucky, — a fool, if you will, — but I have my chance at last. I verily believe it is the chance of a thousand. A little money now would mean a fortune in a few years. Men are growing rich while I am but getting deeper in difficulty. Out in the colonies of America I could turn a shilling into a

pound in no time. And I have not even to face the question of experience. I may go with one who has enough experience for both. He is willing to take a partner in a venture he is about to make, and truly I think myself fortunate to have met with him at this juncture."

"You want to leave England?"

The question came almost with a gasp.

"What else can I do?" said Fulke. "I must go somewhere, if I would keep out of prison. Where could I have a better opening? I have done little enough here."

"And you desire to go and leave me all alone?"

The words were reproachful.

"It would make no difference to you," said Fulke. "You would stay with Sir Julian and Lady Betty, as usual."

"And no difference to you? Will it be all the same to you when the sea is between us?"

He looked at her inquiringly. Somehow it was not natural for him to view things in the light of what, in his inmost heart, he called sentiment.

"Of course I should prefer to remain at home. It is a species of banishment," he said. "But it is better to be banished than to be imprisoned."

"Then you really intend to leave me behind?"

"Why, yes! As a matter of fact, it never occurred to me to take you along."

"Did it occur to you to think what I was to live on when this place was gone?"

Her voice was growing hard again.

"Why, you will have to stay with Sir Julian and Lady Betty, of course. There could be no better arrangement."

"Stay as a beggar?"

He looked at her sharply.

"There will be no thought of money in Sir Julian's

mind," he said. "He and Lady Betty will be just as glad to have you then as now."

"And you are content that your sister should be a pauper?"

"What nonsense you talk!" said Fulke impatiently. "As if there could ever be any such question in your case. Of course you will repay them when I succeed. I never intended this money to be anything but a loan. You shall have every penny of it again, and in the meantime a fair share of the profits will be yours. If you were a man instead of a girl, you would perceive how much this scheme is to your advantage."

"Suppose that the profits should be naught?" said Aveline.

"They will not be. It is impossible. And in any case you would be safe. Sir Julian would never grudge a home to his own niece."

"Fulke," said Aveline, slowly and thoughtfully, "I do not know whether your plan be a wise one or not, but one thing is certain. If you go to the colonies in pursuance of this scheme, and take with you all the money this place will bring, you will not go alone. If we make the venture together, it must be together."

Her eyes were reading his face. For the moment it expressed annoyance and defeat. Then he laughed.

"I wonder what you think you could do out there," he said.

"I don't know. I don't pretend to know. But under the circumstances you propose, our place is together. Does it make the alternative harder?"

There was a wistful tone in her voice.

"Yes. In one way it does."

A deeper shadow passed over her face. Fulke saw it.

"You are a foolish child," he said, "or you would not think you know better than your elders. It is not

reasonable that the thought of taking you to probable hardship could be pleasant to me."

But even as he spoke Fulke saw possible advantages in the plan. If Aveline went with him, Sir Julian's guardianship over her would practically cease, and the young man could not but see that any defection on his part in the matter of payments would not be as summarily visited upon his head. Not that he had any grave doubts of ultimate success. Only there was always the possibility of failure, and in taking from Aveline the home that had been their father's provision for his daughter, he was taking from her everything she possessed. It was this thought that had almost availed to change his purpose.

"But suppose I am willing to put up with the hardship?"

"I am afraid you do not know what a change of circumstances it will be. Life in the Province of New York, where I shall go if I venture at all, is not like life at the House."

"But we should be together. Could I not make it happier for you?"

"Of course you could," said Fulke, gaining possession of the hand that had dropped from his shoulder. "And a good little housekeeper you would be. But it would be selfish to let you go. Sir Julian would never consent."

It was so long before the discussion ended that Joan had found time to clear and sweep and scrub away every trace of the wedding revellers, and John was hovering about, persuading her to shut up the house and come with him to the new village home, while yet the brother and sister were in earnest converse.

"Hoot, man, you can wait a bit longer on Miss Aveline's pleasure," said Joan. "You will have enough of me before a month is out, I'll answer for it."

But John was impatient. He had waited for Joan long enough to make him imperious in this day of the fulfilment of his hopes. Everything was in readiness for shutting up the house. Until now Joan had been left in charge of the old home, though Aveline had taken up her abode at the Great House with her uncle. Now the place was to be closed until the tenant came. Joan lingered over the last duties, waiting for the brother and sister to appear.

"Better go and remind them of the lateness of the hour," suggested John. "They have lost all account of time, or they would have started for the House before this."

"Mr. Fulke said he should stay here," said Joan. "But mayhap he will think better of it. If not, I must get him supper before I go, and maybe come up again to see that all is comfortable for the night."

John's answer was certainly a growl. Just now he did not feel particularly loyal to the young man who was delaying his happiness.

Joan's hand was on the door-knob, and her knuckles were in contact with the door, for she had concluded to know her fate, even at the risk of disturbing Miss Aveline, when the handle was turned from the inside, and Fulke threw the door open wide. His face wore a softened look that did not escape Joan's scrutinizing eye.

"Why, what is this?" he asked, as he stepped back.

"I was coming to see if you wanted aught else to-night, sir," said Joan, in nowise disconcerted by the sudden encounter. "It is getting time for Miss Aveline to be at the House, and as for John, his patience has ebbed out long ago, and he is like to begin his new life with a fit of the spleen."

"That is too bad, Joan," said Aveline, coming to the door and laying her hand affectionately on Joan's.

"Fulke, you had better come up to the House with

me. It is not fair to cheat Joan of her wedding pleasures."

"Nay, good Joan, that shall not be," said the young man, in the hearty tones the good woman remembered of old. "I will even shift for myself to-night. Go you to your new duties, and every happiness go with you."

But Joan was not to be persuaded. Not until the table was set for supper, and Fulke's room prepared for him, did she gladden John's heart by walking through the village by his side. It was in the quiet time between the day and the night, and under the overhanging trees in the park, through which Aveline was at that moment making her way, the shadows were thick. They availed to hide the tears that she would not for anything have allowed Lady Betty or Sir Julian to see, and when she came out into the open space about the House the girl was herself again.

CHAPTER VI

THE library windows were thrown open wide, and Sir Julian Nevard stood with his back to one of them, his ample figure showing dark and imposing in the opening. There was a difference of opinion between Sir Julian and Lady Betty. Not that this was in any way an unusual state of affairs. The only unusual feature was the persistency with which Sir Julian returned to the attack.

"The girl's a fool where that scapegrace is concerned," he said, and though the words were harsh, the full rich tones of Sir Julian's voice robbed them of half their ugliness.

"Then let her abide by her folly," said Lady Betty. "I'll wager she's not half such a fool as you give her credit for being."

"The boy's never been any good, and never will be," asserted Sir Julian.

"Little you know what he'll be," returned Lady Betty. "What chance has he had? Time enough to pass judgment when he has had a fair show."

"Fair show! Didn't he have more money spent over sending him to Cambridge, and clearing off his debts before he could come away again, and then starting him afresh in London, than ever has fallen to the girl's share? And what did he make of it all?"

"What did he make? As handsome a young fellow as any in England. What more would you have? The lad was never meant to be a molly-coddles."

"I fear me he was never meant to be a man, or if he was, there was some mistake in the making," said Sir

Julian. "Handsome, forsooth ! He's in a handsome case now, sure enough."

"And like to keep there, if you have your way," retorted Lady Betty.

"Yes, and so he may," said Sir Julian. "Who's to look after the girl's interests if I don't? You women are all alike. Give you a young scamp with a pretty face, and he may play the mischief with your pockets and your hearts."

"Take your own way then," said Lady Betty, "and see what thanks you'll get either from the one or the other. I'll warrant you Aveline will never rest with that lad behind a prison gate."

"Scant rest she's likely to have any way," growled Sir Julian. "The child's life is bound to be spoiled, look at it from which side you will."

"Hoity-toity ! A girl's life isn't spoiled so easy. Ten to one but in twelve months' time she'll be glad of the change."

Sir Julian shook his head.

"Nay, your wit is good enough as a rule," he said, "but where that boy is concerned your heart speaks louder than your head. 'Tis the change I fear. It is too violent. And the child's heart is not in it. Truly, I have the greatest mind to put my foot down upon the whole affair. I could lend the lad a little —"

"And lose your money for your pains," interrupted Lady Betty. "What end will it answer? A change of surroundings is what the lad needs. Give him a new start, and he is made. Leave him here, and he is undone."

There was truth in Lady Betty's words. So far as Fulke was concerned, Sir Julian fully approved of the plan of emigration. But it was another thing for Aveline. When the girl first came to him with her proposition, he flatly refused to listen. Give up her home?

Sell the house that was her father's provision for her future? Not while he was her guardian. He waxed hot and wroth against the youth who had dared to put such an idea in the child's head.

Had he but known it, his wrath had done more than anything else to confirm Aveline in her half-formed determination. Her home was very dear to the girl. It seemed almost impossible that she could give it up. Even when she promised Fulke to think over his proposition, and talk with her uncle about it, she could not really resolve to cut herself off from the old life. The future, too, looked dark. But when she broached the matter to Sir Julian, and met his uncompromising denunciations of her brother, she gradually shifted her ground. Fulke had not been far wrong in saying there was no hope for him — no hope but in her. And was she, too, to fail him? In Sir Julian's anger she read the world's judgment against the offender, and she ranged herself on his side.

The young man had displayed considerable discretion in keeping away from the House until the storm had had time to blow over. Of Lady Betty's sympathy he was certain. The lad had always been a favourite with that sharp-voiced lady, and she thought it only proper that his sister should sacrifice her interest in his behalf. But Sir Julian was obdurate. The greatest concession Aveline could win from him was the promise that he would talk to Fulke, and see whether there was "anything beyond foolery in the scheme." For the rest, she was obliged to wait. Sir Julian had full control over her and her property, and full liberty to make any provision that might seem to him to be for her benefit. With his consent the house could legally be sold — without it she was powerless.

It was no wonder that Fulke's breath came a trifle irregularly, as, a little later in the day on which Lady

Betty and Sir Julian had so amicably discussed his affairs, he met his uncle in the library for the purpose of unfolding his scheme. Sir Julian looked taller, more ample, and more imposing than usual. There was a certain stately formality about him, a judicial air, that was not without its effect on the young man. It was not easy to hold on to illusions in that presence. Plain facts looked plainer and more uncompromising. It was possible, in Sir Julian's deep musical voice, to designate actions by their simple unvarnished titles without being brutal, but such handling of them was not pleasant to the listener.

Fulke had not found it a particularly easy task to tell the story of his difficulties to his sister. To unburden himself to Sir Julian was, to say the least of it, no easier. Certain accommodating reservations, by which, in the former case, he had saved his credit, were of no avail to-day. There was an uncomfortable directness about Sir Julian's questions, and an uncompromising candour about his method of summing up the information they brought him. Moreover, he insisted upon going into the subject of the debts before he touched on the young man's scheme for retrieving them. Not that Fulke was prepared with anything like a clear statement of his liabilities. It had been too long his aim to keep himself in ignorance of unpleasant facts, to leave it possible for him to give his uncle all the particulars he demanded.

But if Sir Julian did not succeed in getting a very clear idea of the extent of his nephew's indebtedness, he managed to give that young man a very clear idea of how his follies looked in the light of their inevitable consequences. By the time he was free to lay bare his plans for the future, Fulke found himself entirely lacking in that hopefulness of heart that had before been of so much assistance to him in setting forth the advantages of the proposed venture. Nevertheless he did his

best to convince Sir Julian of the almost certain fortune that awaited him in the Province of New York, whither he desired to convey himself, and all that was left of the proceeds of his sister's inheritance when his debts were honourably paid. Every penny that could be spared was to go towards purchasing such articles as would most surely tempt the native taste, for it was as a trader among the Indians that Fulke expected to reap the rich harvest to which he was looking forward.

The stranger who had come to him for surgical assistance was but lately returned from that province, having come to England for the purpose of taking over a large assortment of goods likely to prove useful in the Indian trade. He was willing to give Fulke the benefit of his experience, and to admit the young man into a fair and equal partnership with himself. There were more openings than he could take advantage of, and he was desirous of associating with himself a young and active man.

Sir Julian listened critically. Once or twice he nodded assent. Fulke's spirits rose. He began to hope for ultimate success. He made much of the gain, and touched lightly on the price that was to be paid for it. In the midst of his comfortable anticipations, Sir Julian cut him short.

"You had better go down to Crowfields for a few days," he said, "and leave your sister to think the matter over. It is not a trifle you are asking of her."

"I am little likely to forget that, sir," said the young man. "Yet, much as I need the money, I would not ask her to do it were it not for her benefit. It is but a pittance at best, between her and poverty, — the rent of my father's place. When she might change it for riches, aye, possibly for great riches, in a few years, it seems but sentimental folly to refuse."

Fulke was warming with his subject.

"Exactly so," said Sir Julian drily; "especially when your sister remembers the evident proofs of thrift and business capacity that have been given by the young man who is to accomplish all these wonders. Verily, none but a sentimental girl would hesitate to sell her inheritance, and place the proceeds in the hands of — well, let us put it in a mild form — of one who has shown so little wit, or so little care for the consequences, that his own share of wealth — and it is as well to remember that this was by far the larger share — has vanished in thin air. Such inexplicable reluctance is only worthy of a girl's foolishness. But she's a girl with a heart, Fulke," said the older man, his tone changing at the words, and his voice taking to itself a gentle ringing clearness, "and it would have to be a big sacrifice she would not be prepared to make for the sake of a certain scapegrace brother, who, to my mind, knows little of the treasure he possesses in that girl."

For a moment Fulke drew himself up proudly, and his eyes flashed as he met those others which were regarding him so coolly. Something in the steadfastness of the gaze, however, made his eyelids droop. After all, his answer was a humble one.

"I have little doubt that I seem to you both a rogue and a fool," he said. "Possibly I deserve the judgment."

"You will be all you say, and more, if you take lightly this sacrifice from your sister, and go the way you have been walking of late," said Sir Julian plainly. "Mind you, I make no promise that I will allow her thus to put her future in your hands. But should she do so, none but an arrant coward would let her suffer for her generosity."

"By what right do you infer that I could be guilty of the meanness you describe?" asked Fulke hotly.

"By what precedent am I to infer that you will not?" demanded Sir Julian.

The young man turned away. He was well aware that his uncle was speaking but the plain truth, but under existing circumstances no calumny could be quite so galling as this same unexaggerated truth. Fulke had always found it expedient to avoid as far as possible coming to close quarters with Sir Julian. Yet, in his heart, the older man had a strong desire to help the younger. Also he knew that the idea having once taken possession of Aveline's mind, she would never rest until she had found some way of helping her brother. But he adhered to his determination of postponing his decision. It was only fair that Aveline should have time to weigh the matter well before she consented to so complete a change. His nephew would be comparatively safe at Crowfields, a small shooting-lodge belonging to Sir Julian, and a little solitary reflection would be no bad beginning for a new career.

So to Crowfields Fulke repaired, while Lady Betty fumed, and Aveline's face wore a wistful look that caused Sir Julian to utter many an exclamation, not quite of the nature of a blessing, in which the name of his young nephew figured conspicuously.

CHAPTER VII

THERE was no sign of the sun, nor would be for an hour and more, though the yellow dawn was trying its strength with the starlight in about an even competition. The earliest birds were not yet awake. The Great House had opened one eye, for a maid had just unclosed a shutter, and let in a puff of the cool morning air. Aveline felt its breath as she came softly down the broad stairs, and paused a moment before she drew back the heavy bolt of the front door. She took a long, deep draught of it as she stood on the step without, and lifted her face to the stars.

"It's almost the last," she said, and there was a catch in her voice.

Nobody heard her, for there was nobody to hear. The Great House was asleep, all but the solitary maid who had risen earlier than usual to meet the special need of the day.

Aveline slowly descended the steps, and went by a side path into the park. There was nothing uncertain about her movements, though the light was very faint. She knew every step in the dark almost as well as in the light. When she came out into the open road the dawn had triumphed. The stars were put out of countenance; they shone faint and weak, as became the vanquished. There was a twitter of birds now, and the first awakening of life.

Aveline stood still, and turned her face to the growing light. There was just enough of it to show the outline of a house standing among the trees, and a long avenue from the big gates. It was the last time she would see the sun rise over those walls. There was nobody to see

how long she stood looking towards the house. When she moved on, her step was more hurried. She did not turn in at the gates. That was to come later. Her destination was the village, and the particular spot in the village was the carpenter's dwelling. No need to question whether Joan would be astir. The girl's own heart told her that sleep in John Arkwright's home had been a one-sided affair that night.

She saw the smoke from the chimney before she reached the cottage, and without knocking she opened the kitchen door and stepped inside. Joan was there. Aveline had been sure she would be. She was standing over the hearth, raking the embers together. She did not turn when the door opened, and Aveline stood a moment looking at the strong, reliable figure, that figure which had formed a part of her life as long as she could remember.

"Joan," she said, and there was a wistful longing in her voice that overcame Joan's reluctance to expose the tears which reflected the dancing firelight.

She turned and held out her arms. They closed about the girl, shutting her in and holding her warmly.

"My child, my little girl! I can't let you go," she said.

She heard a stifled sob, and felt a tear drop on her neck.

"It's not too late," she cried eagerly. "Think better of it, deary. Trust Joan's judgment. I'm older than you, child, and I *know* I'm right in this."

She felt the lithe form in her arms quiver as she spoke.

"Leave it all to me," she continued. "I'll tell Sir Julian, and —"

"No, no," said Aveline, struggling to free herself, and lifting her face from Joan's shoulder to speak the more emphatically. "I did not mean to draw back, and I

could not if I would. I am going, and I want to go. But — Joan — I feel as if I could not bear it. It seems like leaving *him* behind."

Her head went down on Joan's shoulder again.

"It's all a mistake, a terrible mistake, and the master would be the first to say so," said Joan brokenly. "Trust me, dear, and believe what I say. Did I ever tell you wrong?"

Aveline made no answer. She was thinking that to-morrow those strong safe arms would not be around her.

"Joan," she said, "I have never done without you for one day all my life, not even since John stole you away."

She lifted her head as she spoke. For a moment Joan's face was averted. Then the strong clasp of her arms relaxed. She drew back a step.

"Miss Aveline," she said, "it's come to the last chance. I haven't wanted to say anything against Mr. Fulke, least of all to you. But, dear, you are doing wrong to trust him."

"Joan! How dare you?"

Aveline drew herself up proudly. Not even from Joan could she bear reproach of her brother.

"Nay, nay, deary! Don't take it so. I mean no disrespect to the young master. But he is no great safeguard for a young maid, and right well I know it."

"You are unjust to him," said Aveline hotly.

Joan shook her head.

"Haven't I known him, as little lad and big one, for eighteen years and more? My child, he means to be true. Mr. Fulke never meant other. But between what he means to be, and what he is, there's all the difference in the world."

"You do him wrong," said Aveline. "He is tremendously in earnest over this. It is the one great chance

of his life. Surely you would not begrudge it to him — you of all others."

"If he could have it without risking your happiness, I would say never a word. I'd not grudge the poor lad another chance, even though the money went the way of all the rest," said Joan. "But it's risking *you*, and not money."

"You never believed in him," said Aveline reproachfully.

"Alack! He stands in no need of my believing in him. He believes too fully in himself," said Joan, and relapsed into silence.

Aveline stood watching her, love and reproachful anger struggling together. Suddenly Joan advanced, and took both the girl's hands between her own.

"Miss Aveline, let it all go," she said pleadingly. "Let him take the money, poor boy, and try again. But you — stay here, dear. There's Sir Julian loves you so well that his face has grown worried and old for sorrow at your going, and as for the money, while John and me's got health to earn it, you'll not know the need of that."

"Joan, Joan, there's nobody like you in all the world," said Aveline brokenly. "What shall I do without you to love me and scold me? But, Joan, dear, it is no use. Fulke needs me, needs me as surely as he needs the money. Can't you see what an incentive it will be to him to succeed? He must not fail, he *cannot* fail, for if he did he would drag me down too. And for all you may say, you bad Joan, he is not wicked enough for that."

Joan sighed. Her last hope had failed her. She knew now that this girl, who had been to her as daughter and mistress in one, would surely go from her before the day was many hours older.

The fresh wood upon the fire crackled and blazed up

sharply, the daylight without brightened. Once John opened the door into the kitchen, but he shut it again with such haste that neither Joan nor Aveline saw him. The good man went out by the front door, and crossed over to his workshop at the back of the yard, where the pile of clean white boards stood awaiting the carpenter's plane. Joan had forgotten all about breakfast. She had no thought for any but the girl who stood with quivering face trying to find courage to say the fatal word that should end the old life. Joan would be at the House to see her off by the stage, but the real good-by must be said now. A broad beam of sunlight fell across the brown bands of Joan's hair. Afterwards Aveline always saw Joan thus, her head sun-brightened as it was that morning when she looked down upon it. She drew her forces together for the inevitable moment.

"Good-by," she said. "Next to my father, you have loved me best."

When Aveline shut the door behind her, and stepped out into the warm May sunshine, she left Joan standing by the hearth. Just there the carpenter found her a good while later, when thoughts of breakfast had constrained him to anticipate the summons that should have come from the house.

"Why, Joan, lass ! Ain't the victuals about ready?" he asked.

She made him no answer. He went up to her, and laid his hand on her shoulder.

"Cheer up, old girl. 'Twould have had to come some day," he said. "Miss Aveline's too handsome a lass to be left for the likes of you to coddle. You'd have had to part with her, sooner or later. All the lasses have got to go out of the good wives' care."

"Go, yes ! But where? Tell me that," broke out Joan. "Do they go to the end of the earth with no

better protector than a young man so cock-sure of himself that he'll never know he's falling till he's down, and has dragged that child down with him? If Miss Aveline was going away with a good husband, I'd have never a word to say against it, though I should not see her face till she was a woman grown. But to let her go thus! 'Tis rank folly, as Sir Julian might know."

That he did not know was not Joan's fault. When she first heard of the project, Joan went to headquarters. She sought Sir Julian himself.

"You'll mayhap think me but a meddler, sir," she said, "but she's my own little lass, so to speak, and I can't stand by and see her sacrificed without putting in my word."

"Nay, nay, good Joan," said Sir Julian pleasantly, "we all know your love for Miss Aveline. I doubt not you will feel like a hen robbed of her chicks when the two are gone. But we shall all miss her sorely."

"Aye, 'twill be wearisome enough without Miss Aveline," said Joan. "But it's not of that I'm thinking. I'm sore troubled for the child herself. Heaven forbid I should say aught against the lad. He's mine too, as one may say, for he was but a little bit of a boy when my mistress left him in my care. But I daresn't hold my tongue, though it does seem cruel to speak. Sir Julian, he's a nice lad and a pleasant, but did you know him as I do, you would not put this responsibility on his shoulders."

"Ah," said Sir Julian, "you do not see that this is the very reason we mean to let him go. 'Tis the responsibility that will be the making of him. For the lad means well, he surely means well this time."

"I doubt not that he means well, sir, well enough," said Joan; "but between what Mr. Fulke means to do, and what he does, there's a gap just wide enough to

swallow up the one that puts confidence in him. Sir Julian, he's not to be trusted with Miss Aveline."

"Nay, Joan, but these are hard words," said Sir Julian gravely. "The boy has scarcely merited them of you."

"Woe's me that I have to say them, sir!" said the woman. "'Tis the first time I've ever said aught against the boy, but there's Miss Aveline's future at stake, and I can't hold my tongue."

"You are hard on the lad," said Sir Julian. "You look at but one side of his character. He is very sure of himself. I trust he may be right, and you wrong. It may be that you do not quite know him."

"He does not know himself," said Joan, with a shake of her head. "'Twas a lesson he could never learn when he was a bit of a child, though it might come in his way a dozen times a day. He'd always believe in himself in spite of all that befell. And he's the same lad still."

"Well, well, your prophecy is but a doleful one, but it is well known that Miss Aveline is the favoured chick," said Sir Julian. "As for the arrangements, they have been made, and Miss Aveline would be the first to scold both you and me were we to attempt to unmake them."

And Joan had been forced to leave it so, though her judgment condemned the whole thing. Sir Julian, having decided in his nephew's favour, allowed nothing to hinder him from giving his full support to the scheme. He had much hope that the added responsibility would prove just the incentive Fulke needed. Moreover, there was another motive, kept well in the background of his consciousness, that yet had its influence in determining the result. Sir Julian had long desired to possess that portion of the ancestral estate which had fallen to the share of his younger brother. Too generous ever to betray the wish while his brother lived, it yet had its effect upon him now, and inclined him to look

more favourably upon his nephew's proposal. He gave so handsome a price for the house and grounds that it sent Fulke back to London too much elated to see anything but hope ahead of him. That was a month ago.

The morning sun mounted high. It wanted less than an hour to the time when the stage was due at Eastenholme. Breakfast had long been waiting at the Great House. Sir Julian had grown anxious, and Lady Betty wrathful, but Aveline did not come.

"I think I had better go and look for the child. I fear she has lost all account of time," said Sir Julian, at last.

"Bless the girl! She's but a little goose at best," replied Lady Betty. "'Tis some of Joan's nonsense keeping her, mark my words if it's not."

Sir Julian turned towards the door.

"There, you may save yourself the trouble," said Lady Betty. "Here comes the foolish maid herself."

Aveline had indeed lost count of time. Kneeling in her father's study, with her head buried in the chair which even now seemed to hold in itself a personality that was part of her memory of him, the girl put aside the restraints wherewith she had held her grief in check, and allowed the rush of tenderness and sorrow and loneliness to pass over her. It seemed to her that all the tangible world was slipping away from her. There *was* a life, undoubtedly, that lay beyond the sea, but it was unreal — shadowy. She was turning her back on life, so far as she knew it. Through and through her thrilled the thought that she was kneeling in that spot, surrounding herself with the home atmosphere, for the last time. To-morrow — no, to-day — she would be an atom, a bit of humanity without a setting, a human being that had no definite place in the order of things. Suppose Joan was right? And with the thought of Joan's strong shel-

tering love, an overwhelming longing for that stronger and more tender love which had always been about her like an atmosphere came to the girl.

"Father, your little girl is afraid," she whispered, and heavy sobs shook her.

She had no consciousness of time. She did not know that the sun mounted higher and higher, and that the world of Eastenholme had long ago set itself to its morning tasks. It was a very little thing that roused her at last — the twitter of a bird close to the window. She lifted her head and saw how the sun streamed in. Then she stood up with a dazed expression on her face. She moved a step away, came back, and touched the chair tenderly.

"Good-by," she said, and turned and passed out, walking fast.

"Did ever anybody see the like?" was Lady Betty's greeting, before ever Sir Julian could speak. "Your face is as white as a sheet, and you are shaking like a leaf. Had you no better sense than to go traipsing abroad these hours, when you should have been preparing for your journey by a right hearty meal? I want no hungry maids to go from my house."

"And there you will not be disappointed," said Aveline, trying to smile. "There is but small danger of hunger. I think it would be better not to try breakfast to-day, because then, you see, there would be no last time about it." Her voice faltered a little.

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Lady Betty. "Sit you down, and eat your breakfast. As for last times, every meal is a last time for its own occasion. Take it as a beginning instead of an end. That's the sensible way to look at life. Each end's but the prelude of a beginning."

After all, Aveline was forced to make a pretence of breakfast. It was over quickly. Even Lady Betty dis-

played no great appetite. There was some relief in getting the meal over.

"Aveline, child," said Sir Julian, laying one hand on the girl's shoulder, and placing the other under her chin, that he might turn her face up to his, "I don't like to let you go. I'm afraid I've not been wise, after all. If this should not turn out for the best —"

"Fiddlesticks!" interrupted Lady Betty. "A nice start you'd give the child, putting such fancies into her head. Where better could a young maid be than under the protection of her own brother, and what better reward could she have than seeing his life grow into usefulness and prosperity?"

Sir Julian was looking into the eyes that were swimming with tears.

"Little girl," he said, in a voice that was low and tender, "I don't mean to give up my charge altogether to that youngster. You belong to me still, mind that, and if things should turn out wrong instead of right, your home is here."

Aveline looked at him gratefully.

"There it is again," said Lady Betty contemptuously. "Turn out wrong! What's to make them wrong, unless, indeed, such ill-omened prophecies bring bad luck with them. In the name of all that's sensible, why shouldn't the boy and girl prosper? Aveline's place is by her brother's side, and if she's half a girl she'll stay there."

"Lady Betty is right," said Aveline firmly. "Fulke and I will stand by our decision, and by one another. But — it is good to hear you say it, uncle dear."

He drew her into his arms.

"My brother's little daughter," he said, "never forget that this is your place."

He felt the quiver that went through her, and he stooped and kissed her forehead.

"I will never forget, Uncle Julian," she said, "but till we can both come to you as a success, we will neither of us come at all—for Fulke's sake."

She was thinking of words she had heard her uncle say. He had not meant that she should hear. They were intended for Fulke's ears alone, and were framed accordingly. It was on the day upon which he acquainted the young man with his decision, and met his unbounded delight and enthusiasm.

"I am overjoyed that you see it as I do," said his nephew. "I am convinced that it is as much for my sister's good as for my own."

"I trust that it may prove so," replied Sir Julian gravely. "Did I not think you would watch over her interests as jealously as your own, I would give a very different answer. Mind you, I place her in your charge, and expect of you that you will fill to her my place. You will have in your hands all that she possesses. Understand that the step you take is a final one. You are in no way to consider yourself at liberty to throw off the obligation, and return your sister to my care. It is your place now to care for her as your father would have done."

A slight sound, a quickly drawn breath, caused Sir Julian to look round. Aveline stood within the door. As he turned she crossed the room swiftly to her brother's side.

"Uncle Julian," she said, "Fulke and I will stand or fall together. We will neither of us come back on your hands."

"Tut, child!" said Sir Julian, trying not to appear disconcerted. "Haven't you wit enough to see that the shirking horse needs the spur? Go you to Lady Betty. Young maids know naught of business, and business alone is my pleasure with this young man now."

Aveline had done as she was bidden, but she had not

forgotten either her uncle's words or her own. Fulke's honour was at stake, and to Aveline this meant that her own honour was equally involved.

Breakfast over, there was nothing to be done but walk to the park gates.

Aveline's possessions had been sent on before, so that there might be no delay in getting them on board the vessel that was almost ready to sail. Quite a little crowd was waiting at the gates. Not a few of the servants from the Great House had come to see the girl off, and these had been joined by many of the villagers, for Aveline had grown up among them all, and they gathered round her with the familiarity of old friends.

"Come now, my girl, get the good-byes over, and the tears all shed," said Lady Betty briskly, breaking in on the leave-takings, and the prognostications, cheery and cheerless. "Yonder's a cloud of dust that can be due to naught but the stage, and I've no mind to treat the travellers to a tragedy scene that'll save 'em the expense of going to the play when they reach the city."

She herself bestowed upon the girl a vigorous kiss.

"There, there, be a brave maid, and do your duty," she said kindly, "and I'll warrant that you'll be none the worse for the change, and that you'll live to be glad you've taken this step. You've got the stuff in you to make a woman, I'll say that for you, and you're going where it'll be brought out."

"Don't forget that if you find no warm nest in the new life, there's a safe one in the old," said Sir Julian.

Joan had no word but a whispered blessing. Regardless of the onlookers, she put her arms tenderly about the girl for the last time. Her lips were the last to touch Aveline's. Then the girl climbed to the top of the stage-coach, sat up very straight in her seat, and waved her hand to the group by the gates. The driver cracked his whip, the horses started, and the journey to

America began. Aveline was strangely conscious that she belonged to the old life no more. Even now it was closing up about the place she had occupied. She leant forward, and saw the home group beginning to melt away.

They had seen the last of her — Aveline Nevard. What was the place that was to welcome her? As they passed the old home Aveline was so absorbed in looking that she started when a gray-haired benevolent-looking man by her side said good-naturedly :

“Going away to one of them city boarding schools to learn all the latest ways, ain’t you, my dear?”

“No, sir,” she said. “I’m going to London to meet my brother. We are to travel together;” and between trying to answer the old man’s questions, and not miss a bit of the dear home scenery, she found enough to do until the limits of old associations were passed. She had not time to think a great deal about the future, for her companion found so much to tell her of the parts through which they passed, that she must needs give him her attention.

“Faith, and here comes my Lady Gravely in her best coach,” he cried, as a backward glance revealed the fact that a big gayly gilded coach-and-six was turning into the highway. “Now for as spirited a race as can be seen in His Majesty’s dominion, for, if I’m not at fault, the footman that’s running before her to-day is John Speedy himself. The fastest knave in all England, my dear. Watch him well, for if he let us keep our distance ahead of him, I’ve lost my mark.”

Every head was turned back now to watch the runner, who, in coat and skirt of blue, preceded the six strong horses that drew his lady’s coach. The footman’s head was raised. He threw himself into better shape. Those backward-turned heads were a challenge to which there could be but one answer from John Speedy. He raised

his long staff, and waved its silver-balled end towards the driver of his lady's coach. That worthy applied the whip, and the six horses stretched themselves for the race.

The stage-driver needed no urging to try the effect of a liberal application of his own whip. Up the hill and down again dashed the stage-coach, up the hill and down again came the runner, well ahead of my lady's coach. The passengers shouted and waved their hands. Two-legged locomotion was gaining on four. Slowly the distance between the running footman and the stage lessened, till upon the brow of a hill the runner triumphantly waved his staff as he passed the leader, and went swinging down the hill, heading the procession.

"Well done, John Speedy," shouted Aveline's gray-haired neighbour. "What think you of that, my dear? Right well he merits his refreshment," he added, as, the foot of the hill reached, the runner halted, unscrewed the silver ball from the end of his staff, and took a sip of the white wine it contained.

"Another hour and we reach the city," said Aveline's entertainer, when my lady's coach had given up the race, and the stage-horses had resumed their usual steady swing. "And then, I doubt not, will come your brother's greeting. He will know better than to leave so pretty a face to be viewed by strange eyes."

"I trust he will be at the inn to meet me," said Aveline. "He was warned when I should arrive."

"No fear but he'll be there, or his taste must be of the worst," was the answer.

But when the coach drew up at the inn, it was a serving-man who scanned the passengers as he asked:

"Is there here any lady by name of Mistress Aveline Nevard?"

"Aye, right there, in full sight of your eyes, and I'll wager before a week's past there'll be more than one

beau that'll be willing to give much for a smile from her lips," said the driver.

"The mistress bade me lead you straight in," said the man, helping Aveline to the ground.

She was glad to escape the rough but kindly flattery without, and follow the man into the inn.

"My brother? Is he here?" she asked.

"Nay, there's no one here, so far as I have heard," said the man.

He pushed open a door, and led her into the kitchen.

"'Tis the young lady herself," he said.

The mistress came forward hospitably.

"Come right in and sit you down in the chimney-corner," she said. "I've a good room ready for you, but you'll be the better for getting your blood well warmed after your long ride. It is chilly these evenings, though we are well past May-day."

Aveline looked round anxiously. "Is my brother not here?" she asked.

"Nay, I have seen nothing of him. But never fear, my dear. He'll be here before long, I doubt not. Sit you down and rest. Supper's well-nigh ready," said her hostess.

Aveline slowly advanced to the fire. The disappointment of not meeting her brother made her feel doubly lonely. Not but that she was sure of welcome and safety. She owed her reception to the fact that the mistress of the inn was own cousin to Lady Betty's housekeeper, and her good offices had been bespoken for Aveline. The kindly woman bustled about, intent on making the girl feel at home.

"Now then, Benny, don't sit staring at the young lady," she said, giving an admonishing tap upon the head of a tiny boy of three, who sat on a stool in the middle of the hearth, and gazed at the stranger with wide, unblinking eyes.

It is only fair to admit that Aveline returned the gaze. Those grave unchildish eyes disconcerted her. She sat and studied the child, and the child studied her. She watched the upward curves of the smoke that came as gracefully and naturally from between the baby lips that held the pipe as if the smoker had been a sage of seventy. The baby puffed at the pipe and stared at the visitor, and the visitor alternately watched the smoke and the baby's eyes. In a short time the pipe was empty, and the child gravely rose, carried his stool to a point opposite the corner of the mantel-shelf, mounted it carefully, and reached down a knife and a rope of tobacco formed into a roll. With the skill of an adept he prepared enough to fill his pipe, pressed it firmly down, and lit it with a chip stuck into the glowing fire. There was a droll gravity about the whole proceeding that brought a smile to Aveline's lips in spite of herself. Her hostess saw the smile.

"He's a queer one, ain't he?" she said proudly. "You wouldn't think now he warn't three till Midsummer-day. But, bless you, there's many a man grown that ain't got his sense."

"How did he learn to smoke?" asked Aveline, smiling still.

"Blest if I can tell you, miss. Seemed to come natural to him. My man's a great smoker, and that boy ain't never content if he can't have his three pipes at a time. He'd be in a fine takin' if I was to stop him. Bless you, he's done it this year and more. Not but what there's plenty like him for that, but they don't set and smoke as grave as he does, bless his heart. There ain't many like Benny."

Aveline's last glance as she left the kitchen was at the baby smoker, puffing gravely at his third pipe of tobacco.

CHAPTER VIII

“ **A**NY kitchen stuffe, have you, maids ! ”
“ Buy a white line, a Jack line, or a cloathe line ! ”

“ Pretty maids, pretty pins, pretty women ! ”

The London street-cries penetrated to the room where Aveline lay sleeping beyond her usual hour. She started up bewildered. Then, as the sounds from the streets became clearer in her ears, she began to realize that the new life had begun, and to be aware that she felt some interest in it. She was impelled to hasten. Possibly Fulke was already waiting for her below. It was unduly late for a country girl to be in her chamber. But when she found her way downstairs, the young man was not there. The hearty tones of the master of the inn greeted her.

“ A good morning to you, miss,” he said. “ If I’m not hugely mistaken, I have here that which will explain why the young gentleman, your brother, did not appear over night. Not but that ’tis a sore shame so comely a lass should have lost an evening’s pleasure right in the best part of the season, when the beaux and the great ladies are out in all their bravery. But, truth, there may be a good reason for his non-appearance, as this billet should tell.”

Aveline stretched out her hand eagerly for the letter, which she found short and unsatisfactory. It read :

“ MY DEAR SISTER : I trust you have arrived in safety, and are ready for the voyage. I desired to be with you last night, or at latest to-day, but fate was against me. I would gladly have come to you, but could not. I have

encountered many hindrances and difficulties. Everything is behind, and the ship ready to sail. I am distracted with many cares. Just now I must get your effects on board. The ship weighs anchor before night, and I am all belated. You must manage to come to me, like a sensible girl. Ask the good woman of the inn to accompany you, as I doubt not she will be willing to do. Give her the paper inclosed herewith. She will then know where to bring you. I shall be at the river-side at an hour past noon."

That was all. It did not lessen Aveline's uneasiness, but it made the next step plain.

"There's nothing wrong, is there, miss?" asked the mistress curiously.

"I am not sure," said Aveline. "My brother speaks of hindrances that have kept him from coming to me as he intended, but he will meet me by the river-side, at a place he designates, and he bids me ask you to accompany me thither."

"That I will, right willingly," said the good woman. "But 'tis a crying shame you should go off thus. He might at least have allowed you a sight of the pleasures of London life before you turned your back on them for good. I'll wager now you've never so much as seen a play."

Aveline shook her head.

"Ah, I thought as much. It's a brave sight, surely, and the play-acting is not the whole of it. To my mind, it's as good as the play itself to see the beaux combing their perukes with their lovely ivory combs, and the ladies, with their pretty faces, watching the graceful movements of the lads. Such handsome combs and elegant comb-cases can be seen nowhere but in London. Of course there's beaux and beaux. There's them that can comb a wig as gracefully as a lady can use her fan, and there's others that can never get the go of it, try as

they will. Well, well, if you must go aboard ship to-day, you must. But it's a terrible pity."

The good woman was so determined that Aveline should at least see some of the streets of London, that she forbore to take a hackney coach, insisting that a country girl would find it no great hardship to walk, especially as the distance was not great. Aveline herself was in haste to meet her brother, but she could not stifle a little girlish curiosity at the strange sights of the city. The grandeur of it all impressed her. Here the very workmen wore wigs and cocked hats. She smiled to herself as she tried to picture worthy John Arkwright in a wig.

"There, there! Look where you step!" cried her companion, as the girl set her foot on a loose flagstone.

The warning came too late. A jet of inky mud spurted from beneath the stone, and Aveline looked with dismay at her shoes.

"A beau-trap for certain, and as ugly a one as could be made," said the mistress. "A plague on the chairmen for their meddlesome antics!"

Then, as Aveline looked at her inquiringly, she laughed.

"What? You have never heard of a beau-trap? 'Tis a device of those rascals, the chairmen, whereby they may get even with the beaux that are a bit stingy. They do but loosen a stone, that the water may lodge beneath, and then woe to the silk stockings of the unwary beau who, to save the price of a sedan-chair, attempts to use his own prettily covered legs. Right well the trap answers when there comes a smart shower, such as there was last night."

Arrived at the water-side, Aveline's attention was divided between looking for her brother, and watching the craft that passed up and down the river. Fulke had not yet come, and there was plenty of time to see the

river traffic, and listen to the rough passages at arms between the ordinary river boatmen and the watermen of the private barges. One of these barges, rowed by watermen resplendent in livery, was manifestly making for the steps near which Aveline stood. She was watching its approach with interest when a sound caused her to turn, and she saw Fulke coming towards the river. He had not yet noticed her, being engrossed in the attempt to induce a burly porter to transport safely a big box he carried on his shoulder. In the burden Aveline recognized her own property. A sudden fit of homesick longing seized her, and she left her companion's side and ran towards her brother, holding up her face with the innocent expectation of a kiss.

"Don't, child! What is the matter? Can't you see that everybody is staring at us?"

Aveline drew back hastily, and a wave of colour rushed over her face. Involuntarily she turned her head, in time to see the boat in which she had been interested discharging its load. True enough they were staring — men and women both. The undisguised gaze of the ladies' escort might easily have been construed into admiration, for he would have been a strange gallant of the period who could have helped admiring the straight girlish form, and the face — half averted — in which glad recognition and welcome were changing into the flush of wounded affection and awakened pride. For the ladies themselves, no two constructions could be put upon their supercilious smiles. It is easy to crush a possible rival with a show of contempt, and this girl, in dress and mien, looked as if she might yet be found claiming a share of attention in that section of the world wherein their own pleasures lay. Scorn is a weapon safe to handle, and effective for use against the innocent.

None the less, however, did Aveline imagine that she had made herself ridiculous in the eyes of these worldly-

wise inhabitants of the metropolis. She dropped back to her old position, feeling very young and inexperienced, and, it must be confessed, decidedly angry. Fulke need not have behaved as if he were ashamed of her. People were not in the habit of being ashamed of her. Sir Julian was always proud to have her with him, and Lady Betty—Lady Betty who knew what society was quite as well as did Fulke himself—had said that she had “manners pretty enough for any young gentlewoman.” And Fulke had treated her as if she were nothing but an ill-bred hoiden, to be rebuked and restrained. Underneath the mortification was the sore feeling that this brother of hers did not appreciate as he should the sacrifice she had made for him. Fulke had left Eastenholme overjoyed, making much of her, and predicting all manner of happiness and good for the future as the result of the sacrifice she had made. Now he seemed to have forgotten that it had been a sacrifice at all.

There is possibly less real pain in giving up the desire of the heart than in the apparently trifling added bitterness of seeing the good appropriated by another with no expression of appreciation.

Fulke had passed the two and gone to the water's edge, where he carefully superintended the placing of the box in a waiting boat. Then he returned to his sister.

“You are earlier than I expected,” he said, with an effort to be unconstrained. “You received my letter?”

“Yes. I thought you might have come yourself.”

The tone was decidedly aggrieved.

“I have little doubt you did,” said Fulke. “And you thought, mayhap, that to reach the colonies of America there was naught to do but look after your pleasure. For my part, I am spent with anxiety and discouragement. I wish I had never entered upon the business.”

From the bottom of his heart Fulke at that moment meant what he said. Aveline looked at him dismayed. She would have spoken, but he stopped her. There was a change in his tone.

"Have you paid this good woman?" he asked.

Aveline noticed the anxiety in his face, that lessened as she answered:

"All but the thanks I owe her for taking such good care of me in your absence."

"Then it will be unnecessary to keep her here longer," said Fulke, and the mistress of the inn felt herself dismissed. She turned her head more than once, to see the brother and sister standing near the steps.

"I doubt me the poor lass is not going to as bright a life as her pretty face deserves," she said.

When the woman was out of sight, Fulke hurried Aveline towards the boat.

"There is but another chest to be put aboard now," he said. "The ship weighs anchor before sunset, and there will be plenty to be done getting things stowed away."

His eyes wandered from the boat to the river as he spoke, never once resting on his sister's face.

"Make way there!"

The porter, returning with his second box, rudely pushed Aveline aside, and trudged down the steep steps.

"All ready now, young mistress," called one of the boatmen, and Fulke extended his hand to help his sister. He felt that hers was cold and still.

A few minutes later Aveline found herself a part of the river scene, and almost forgot her grievance in wonder at the torrent of abuse and insulting comment which the passage of the small craft brought down upon them. The chief business of each waterman seemed to be that of annoying other watermen and their passengers. Aveline was not sorry when the dark hull of the vessel for

which they were making overshadowed them. She climbed upon deck and looked curiously around her. Just at this moment curiosity overpowered every other feeling. She wanted to stand and view the vessel from stem to stern, — not a very great proceeding in a ship of four hundred tons burden, — but again Fulke hurried her on. He saw the ship-master approaching, and Aveline thought he was about to lead her towards him. She took a step forward.

"Not there! This is the way to go below," said Fulke, and he held out his hand to assist her.

"But I don't want to go below," she replied. "I want to see what the ship is like."

"You don't know what is good for you," said her brother sharply. "Believe me, you had better —"

But the captain was alongside.

"So, young sir, you have got aboard," he said, in a tone that was too free for politeness. "Is this the wench?"

He looked at Aveline in a way that brought the hot colour to her cheeks.

"You are right. I will go below," she said, turning her back on the offending ship-master.

"This is my sister," answered the young man coldly, and the two passed on, but not before Aveline had heard the comment:

"That's a pretty go! Hang me, if *she'll* find humble pie much to her taste."

They went down into the big cabin. Just then it was deserted. Aveline turned upon her brother.

"What did he mean by speaking thus?" she demanded.

"He's a brute," said Fulke savagely. "You should have come down when I told you. You must let me judge for you now. Have as little to do with him as possible, and take no notice of anything he says. Whatever

you do, don't let him provoke you into talking with him. You will do as I tell you, won't you?"

He was looking at her now pleadingly — Aveline thought, fearfully. A sudden terror took possession of her.

"Fulke," she said, "has he any reason for behaving so? He has no claim on you?"

"Claim?" said Fulke. "What claim could he have? He will have every penny for what he carries over, trust him for that. But I have had trouble. I told you so. And there have been difficulties with him."

Then two or three passengers entered, and Fulke hurried his sister to the little cabin that, even now, she was beginning to find a refuge.

"Stay here awhile," he said. "I must see about the stowing away of the things. You would only meet with rudeness just at present, in the confusion of starting. Later on it will be different."

Aveline shut and fastened the door, and then forgot to take stock of her surroundings. This was such a different beginning from the one she had expected. She was oppressed with a feeling of danger somewhere — just where she could not tell, only she associated it with the captain's strange greeting. She did not understand her brother, and there was at present no opportunity for explanation. She could not tell whether his irritable manner betokened real calamity, or only some temporary difficulty. On one point she was determined. Having cast in her lot with Fulke, she would abide by the consequences. Turn back she could not.

She had plenty of time to think, for Fulke seemed to have forgotten all about her. She could hear the loud voice of the captain giving orders, and the rhythmical shout of the sailors as they hauled in ropes. It was all life and bustle above her head. Below there was no sound to be heard. The sun was getting low;

so much Aveline could see through the tiny porthole of her cabin. She fell to thinking of Joan, and the quiet evening hour when her father used to put his arm in hers and go out to watch the sunset. And then she felt a tear drop on her hand, and sprang up in alarm.

"This will not do," she said, and began to examine the small cabin, and even to peer out upon the river. There was not much to be seen in so narrow a field of view, and she sat down again and listened. The commotion on deck was increasing. Aveline felt sure the ship was about to sail. She cautiously opened her door and looked out. There was no sign of life in this part of the vessel, which seemed doubly lonely by reason of the noise and bustle above.

The stillness had grown intolerable, and in desperation Aveline made her way on deck, coming up into the sunlight with a sensation of relief. Sailors were flinging down coils of rope, and making ready for sailing. The passengers, some twelve in number, stood about the deck, watching proceedings, and getting very much in the way of the seamen. The ship's cow, in a strong but rudely constructed shelter amidships, looked lazily out on the scene, possibly lamenting the necessity of changing her short season of freedom on the green stretches along shore for her old quarters and rations on the ship's deck. On the other side of the vessel, their backs towards her, stood Fulke and the ship-master. They were looking out across the water, and talking so earnestly that they had apparently forgotten they were not alone. Aveline could not see her brother's face, but by his attitude and gestures she knew that he was urging something upon his companion. She stood and watched them, wondering and anxious.

"Stand aside there, young mistress, if you would not be caught by yon rope," called a sailor, and a coil of

rope fell at the girl's feet. She moved to the middle of the deck, standing on a line with Fulke and the captain. The conversation was becoming more animated. Presently the ship-master's voice rose.

"What care I who she is?" he said. "A bargain's a bargain, as I take it. Yes, and I'll see it's carried out. Mind that, young man."

It was not Aveline's fault that the words reached her ear. The tone was too loud for secrecy. Of whom was the captain speaking? She forgot everything else in watching the two. She saw her brother lay his hand on the captain's arm. He half turned as he did so, and there was perplexity and something resembling fear in his face. She could not hear his answer, but gradually the ship-master cooled down. The murmur of voices sounded more conciliatory, and Fulke's manner became less agitated.

"Well, well, let it rest awhile," said the ship-master loudly, and he turned straight about as he spoke. They both saw her at once.

"My stars! There she is," said the ship-master, and for the moment neither he nor Fulke seemed to know what to do next. The captain recovered first, and advanced to meet her. "Glad to see you on deck, young mistress," he said civilly. "Better take your last look at London sights. We are going to run out a bit further before dark."

"You have grown tired of waiting, and no wonder," said Fulke, coming to her side. "I have been unduly long, but I had much to attend to, and many things to settle with the captain."

His ill-humour seemed to have vanished, and he stayed by Aveline, making much of her, and pointing out such buildings of the city as could be seen in the distance.

"We are to run down further before dark, so as to be

ready to sail in the morning," he said. "You will have one quiet night close along shore, and to-morrow, before you are astir, we shall begin our journey in earnest."

"And it is to lead to good things for us, you and me together?" asked the girl, with an undertone of uncertainty in the words.

Her brother turned his head away. He felt that she was trying to look into his eyes.

"You are a little goose," he said, but his arm stole round her, and they stood thus watching the sun as it dipped behind the trees.

CHAPTER IX

ANY one who had known the Fulke of London days, the young beau, and the companion of some of the most reckless youths about town, would have been struck by the change in him, perceptible enough, yet hardly to be described. Aveline felt it, and failed to understand it. To Fulke himself it seemed that a great gulf lay between the youth of a month before and the young man who stood on the outward-bound vessel, and took his last look at the city he accused of treating him ill. The weeks that had intervened since he left Eastenholme had shown him a little more than he had expected to know of the shady side of life. For, in spite of Molly's good offices, Fulke had seen the inside of a debtor's prison.

He returned to London with Aveline's fortune in his possession, and hope enough in his heart to freight a fair-sized vessel. His prospective partner, Roger Bennet, was found at Lloyd's coffee-house, and the two at once entered into arrangements. Fulke paid the debt which had proved threatening, and after estimating as closely as possible his further liabilities, and putting aside enough to pay his own and Aveline's passage, and leave him something in hand when he reached the new world, he expended the rest in Indian stores, buying under the personal direction of Roger Bennet. The trader was in haste to return to America, and when he had himself spent much more money than Fulke had at his disposal, he left the young man to superintend the stowing of the cargo on board the "Bullfinch," the vessel upon which Fulke was to sail. For himself, he

had an opportunity to start earlier, and he satisfied himself with seeing the master of the "Bullfinch," who was an old acquaintance, and instructing him to look after this joint stock of merchandise, and to land it safely at the American port.

All went well until Bennet left London, and then the tide turned. Fulke had not overestimated Wyville's animosity, but he had underestimated the far-reaching effect of his cunning. Every step which the young man had taken had been carefully watched by Wyville's emissaries, who knew the exact amount of money he had spent, and where it had all gone. It was Wyville's aim not to alarm his victim until the right moment, and he was careful at first to present no claim, and to put no obstacle in the young man's way. It was not until he judged that his former companion's resources were nearly exhausted that he took steps to recover the amount owing to him. He made it so much more than Fulke had estimated that the debtor looked at the claim with horrified surprise. To pay it would be to leave himself almost penniless.

Fulke was sure the amount was over-large, and he made the unfortunate mistake of disputing it. This ran the expenses up considerably, and when judgment went against him he had to choose between a debtor's prison and the giving up of the money that was to have paid for the journey to America. He chose the prison, hoping that the largeness of the sum at stake would bring Wyville to terms.

Again he found that he was wrong in his reckoning. Money was a small consideration to Wyville by the side of this opportunity to be revenged on the youth who had dared to oppose his will. To every offer of compromise he returned the same answer—he could afford to wait for his money, and although the amount of his claim, to less than a penny, should be forthcoming, yet

for the shortage of a single farthing he would leave the debtor to his fate for an indefinite period.

It did not take long for Fulke to grow desperate. In ten days the "Bullfinch" was to sail. The greater part of the cargo was on board. For reasons connected with the trade laws of the Province of New York, the consignment had been made in the joint name of his partner and himself. He had no power to remove any of the goods. Go to America when the "Bullfinch" sailed they must and would, and when there they would be lost to him. Aveline's fortune was in that cargo, the loss of which would leave his sister destitute, and put him in the position of a thief. To remain in prison was to lose all; to pay this debt was to leave himself helpless. As far as reaching America was concerned, he might as well be inside the prison walls as outside. He might have appealed to Sir Julian, but this he could not bring himself to do while the memory of his uncle's parting words was fresh.

Every day that he hesitated brought fresh expenses. If this went on much longer he would not have enough money left to secure his release, and Aveline's sacrifice would be altogether in vain. He grew desperate, going the round of possibilities, which all seemed equally impossible.

At last desperation forced him into action. He determined to end the struggle somehow. He swallowed his pride and wrote an earnest appeal to Wyville. He apologized for his hasty interference. He even condescended to explain how matters stood with him, and to beg, for his sister's sake, that his former friend would agree to take part of the money at once, and leave the rest till he could send it to him from America. The young man persuaded himself that Wyville's anger must surely be appeased by so humble an appeal. He refused to take into account the implacable hatred that had fol-

lowed him thus far. It would be different now that Wyville's pride had received the healing balm of such abject apology.

But when he had dispatched the missive by the hand of a special messenger, he began to lose his grip of the hope which had led him on. He tried to sit still and wait for the answer, but the impatience within him drove him to pace up and down, a helpless victim of his own eagerness and fears. He found himself at one moment watching for the return of the messenger, and the next cursing his own folly in ever supposing that Wyville could be won by an appeal to his compassion.

There had been more than sufficient time for the answer to reach him, and still the messenger did not appear. Fulke kept a sharp lookout for his approach, but the hours went by, marked only by the sinking of heart that came with each additional one. He would have given much, now that it was too late, to have had the letter back in his possession. His face grew hot and damp as he imagined that epistle handed round in the circle of which he had often been a member, and allowed fancy to supply the shouts and guffaws over the more touching paragraphs.

He was ready for any bad news when, at last, the messenger came. It was significant that he carried no letter, nor scrap of paper of any kind.

"What! Have you brought me no answer?" asked the young man, struggling hard to keep the ring of anxiety out of his voice, and speaking gruffly that he might at least hide the terrible pressure of his need.

"Not I," said the man, with a chuckle of amusement at the remembrance of his experiences. "None but a fool would have expected answer from him. Not but that he was long enough in dallying with his message; though, for the matter of that, I cared not how long,

since I was to be paid for my time, and there was fun enough to be had."

"What kept you then, fellow?" demanded Fulke, though he had scarce heart enough to keep up the appearance of boldness.

"What kept me?" answered the man insolently. "What but the will of young Mr. Wyville himself? He had me up in his room as civil as you please, and there was a round half-dozen of his stamp a-drinkin' chocolate there, and if that letter didn't give 'em sport, I've lost my mark. There warn't one o' the bunch as hadn't to see it with his own eyes, and when they'd all had a turn, one of 'em read it out loud, and struck a attitude as if he was prayin' for mercy, and they all roared like a good un. Blest if I could help laughin' myself. Make a corpse laugh, that letter would, when one o' them beaux read it."

The hot blood dyed Fulke's face, and then receded, and left it white and drawn.

"Stop that, you scoundrel, and tell me what Wyville said," he cried, in a voice hoarse with passion.

"What he said? Why, he swore a great oath that he was well satisfied with what he'd done for a beginnin', and that the end should be worthy of the start, and if ever you got out of this hole alive, it'd be because he hadn't another card to play."

Fulke paid the messenger, and kicked him out of the door; then, his brain in a whirl of passion and despair, he settled Wyville's claim, and walked forth that very night, the possessor of freedom and an almost empty pocket.

Passion had too much the mastery to allow of his forming any definite plan, but inaction being in his present mood an impossibility, he made his way to the Thames, and went to see how things were getting on aboard the "Bullfinch." For more than an hour he remained in

close conversation with the captain, and when he returned to land it had become possible for him to sail in the "Bullfinch." The cloud had not, however, lifted from his brow, and the tight pressure of his lips hardly spoke of a satisfactory emergence from his difficulties. That night he wrote to Aveline, bidding her join him at once.

Standing on deck this evening he told her of the worries he had encountered, but he did not tell her that when the last debt was paid there had been no money to pay for the passage, and he said nothing of that visit to the master of the "Bullfinch," and its result. He owned that he could not fully meet the captain's claim until he reached America, and warned his sister not to take too much notice of any lapse of courtesy on the part of that worthy.

"There is nothing for it but patience," he said. "You have been such a good little sister thus far. You will not fail me now?"

Aveline would not have been herself if she had not been appeased, and had not indulged in a few dreams that night in her tiny cabin, visions in which Fulke, strong in virtue and happiness, and respected in the far-off American colonies, was seen attributing all his success to his sister's efforts. A thorough woman's dream, and as likely to become a reality as the majority of such visions.

CHAPTER X

"GOOD morning to you, young mistress. You make a first-rate sailor."

The sun, starting up as if from the depths of the sea, had barely succeeded in lifting the rim of his disc clear of the water. The morning breeze blew fresh in Aveline's face. There was a smile on her lips, and a wistful look in her eyes. She had just been telling herself that the red ball was rising over Joan's cottage and the Great House, and the long reach of wave-broken sea between her and the horizon seemed very wide when she remembered that it separated her from home. For four days there had been nothing visible but sea and sky. After the long trip down the coast, with land never far distant, and the line of shore giving a sense of nearness to the old life, this great unmanageable ocean seemed lonely. It was sad, too, but that was towards night, when the darkness gained on the light, and the sound of the waves changed from a song to a lament. It was morning now, and the sea was bright and glad.

The recognition Aveline gave the master of the "Bullfinch" was a cordial one. Since the first day she had had no fault to find with his demeanour towards her. She had seen much of him, for from the beginning he had manifested a desire to cultivate her acquaintance. The passengers on the "Bullfinch" were few—two or three new settlers going with their wives to one or other of the American provinces, and half a dozen returning traders and residents. The ship-master found most to study in his youngest passenger. He was looking at her now with approbation.

"The sea has been good to me, or I might possibly

have shown you how poor a sailor I should turn out," she said.

"Aye, it's been fine sailing weather, good for young lambs and lasses," was the answer.

Aveline laughed.

"The lambs little know the fate that is ahead of them," she said.

"True," he replied, and his sharp eyes scanned her face. "Do the lasses know much more, think you?"

They paced the deck together, stopping at the spot that had always held the greatest attraction for Aveline. Here she came every morning to visit her friends. It was a regular farmyard on shipboard. The ship's long-boat lay firmly lashed amidships, turned from its original purpose into a big pen, in the lower part of which sheep and pigs, in full domestication, attended to their family arrangements, while ducks and geese made their voices heard above, and over all the common barnyard fowls cackled and crowed and fussed, in happy ignorance of the fact that the majority of them would never see land again. Aveline had her especial pets among each, and many a bribe, in the shape of bread or vegetable, did she bring to win their affections.

First of all she must pay her respects to the ship's cow, a good motherly animal, with no gadding propensities, whose home was in close proximity to the long-boat. She was waiting for her share of favour, her moist nose already thrust out to meet the girl's hand.

"Do you happen to know anything about milkin' one o' them critters, and showin' yourself useful in the butter-makin'?" asked the captain.

Aveline laughed.

"Enough to superintend the maids, if need were," she said; "but for the actual milking and churning I should not like to answer."

He stood looking at her.

"You ain't a-goin' to be noways at your ease as a servin'-maid?" he said, and there was interrogation in his tone.

Aveline looked up, wondering to what he could refer.

"Ah, I thought as much," he added, and walked off to the wheel, muttering to himself as he went. The quartermaster heard him say: "Bless the girl, she's as innocent as a babe!" But the next moment the captain was rating him for turning the ship's glass before the last of the sand had run out, and he had no time to conjecture what the words might mean.

Time passed slowly on the "Bullfinch." There were days when the wind died down and the sails hung lifeless, and the seamen scanned the horizon and whistled for a breeze; and there were days when the wind blustered through the rigging, and set the sailors to shortening sail, while it boasted of the storm it could raise if it chose. But it did not choose. Six weeks it had had to carry out its threat, and the promised gale had not come. Now the prospect of reaching land was nearer than the prospect of foul weather.

Everybody on board the "Bullfinch" was in the best of spirits—everybody but Fulke. It was six weeks since he had that little talk with the captain on the day the "Bullfinch" sailed. He had very little to say to the ship-master now. It might even have been imagined that he shunned him.

The captain's eyes twinkled now and again when the young man suddenly abandoned some good lounging place on his own approach.

"So that's the game, is it?" he said to himself, and kept his eye on his passenger.

Fulke was very much with his sister in those days, studying her comfort, and doing his best to make the long voyage pleasant to her. More than once Aveline looked up suddenly to find him watching her with a

troubled, uncertain expression, but the moment she spoke his mood would change, and every trace of uneasiness vanish. As they drew near the other shore she fancied he intentionally kept her out of the captain's way. She was sure that he himself avoided the ship-master, and that the ship-master was aware of the fact.

He was both aware of it, and ill-pleased with it. More than once he directly threw himself in Fulke's way, and watched the effect of the move. Nothing further than a little insight into character resulted, but possibly it was just this that the ship-master sought.

He seemed to have decided at last that he had carried his investigations far enough, for one afternoon, when the deck was unusually free from passengers, and Fulke was walking slowly towards his sister, he planted himself straight in the young man's path.

"How now, young sir? Isn't it time you and me had a talk together?" he said.

Fulke stopped short, but he glanced towards his sister as if he would have made her an excuse for proceeding.

"There ain't no manner of use puttin' it off longer," said the master of the "Bullfinch." "If all goes well there won't be but two days before we're in the port of New York."

"So much the better," was the answer. "Then there'll be no need of talk."

"Look here, young man," said the captain, "this 'ere's gone far enough. I ain't a-goin' to let things rest like that — not if I know it. You're either after tryin' to spring this thing on her, or else on me, and you ain't a-goin' to do neither."

He closely watched the effect of his words, and was not at all surprised to see that beneath the dull red flush of anger on the young man's face there were unmistakable signs of fear.

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Fulke. "You know you cannot have your money until we reach New York. I can do nothing different from that if we talk for a month."

"Yes, you can. You can act honest. That's what you can do. It's nothin' better than actin' the knave to keep that lass in the dark the way you're doin'."

Fulke winced at the plain words.

"You are meddling with what does not concern you," he began, but the ship-master cut him short.

"Don't concern me, don't it? I should like to know who it does concern then. You didn't ask me to wait and let things rest a bit till you could explain it all to the girl, did you? Well, I've waited. Nobody can say I ever said a word to the young maid, though the innocent way she's took things has made me feel like a Judas, by times. 'Pears to me there's them that hasn't got neither conscience nor feelin', but be that as it may, I can't stand it no longer. I ain't a-goin' to be a party to lettin' it be sprung on her all at once, when she goes to set foot on shore, and I ain't a-goin' to risk my money. There, make what you can o' that."

"There is no question of losing money," said Fulke, talking fast to hide his annoyance. "You have but to hold your tongue until we get into port, and then your money will be forthcoming. As for my concerns, they are my own, not yours."

"And if the money shouldn't be forthcomin'?"

"There is no 'if' about it. It *will* be."

"Supposin' it ain't?"

"Then you have the remedy in your own hands."

"In other words, you will carry out your agreement?"

"Yes — I must." There was the irritability of weakness in his tone.

"Just so. And you're a-goin' to take the chance, and never let her know beforehand — leave me the job

of stoppin' her when she starts to go off the ship. No, young feller. You don't come that game, neither on me nor her, so I tell you."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Fulke, turning squarely upon him.

"That if you don't tell the lass, I will."

Fulke's hand sought the hilt of his sword. There was the light of passion in his eyes.

"Hold there!" cried the captain. "I'm king on this vessel, and rebellion ain't likely to be a healthy kind of pastime — not for the rebel. You try any of them games, and I'll make short work with you."

He drew nearer to the young man as he spoke.

"You shall pay for this," said Fulke savagely, "if not on this vessel, then on shore."

"Oh, that's all right," replied the other, with a sneer. "The payin's like to be on the other side, and unless I've lost my mark, it's goin' to prove too much for you, as yonder poor girl will find to her cost."

Fulke glared at him furiously.

"You talk mighty innocent," he said, "altogether too innocent for the instigator of the whole affair. Who but you suggested the alternative?"

"Aye, I did. But did I suggest the knavery alongside of it?" asked the captain. "Did I know what kind of a wench was in question? You came to me in a quandary, and I did but inform you of a method taken many a time before by those who would reach the colonies. You pleased yourself about takin' up with it. But I tell you this, you'd never have had the chance if I'd known you wasn't man enough to face the situation."

"I'm ready enough to face it the moment it is necessary," said Fulke. "At present it is not, and I won't annoy my sister for nothing."

"You won't, won't you? Then that makes it plain sailin' for me. There's nothin' left but to put an end to

this business once for all," said the captain, and with a few quick strides he was at Aveline's side.

She was standing before the ship's long-boat, feeding her pets with tid-bits. The long-boat was almost empty now. Its cargo of live sheep and pigs and poultry was sadly diminished. One by one Aveline's favourites had disappeared, going the way of the cook's galley. Now only the ship's cow and a solitary ewe and lamb remained on the level of the deck, and the hens that cackled above owed their immunity solely to their egg-laying proclivities. The soft eyes of the cow followed the girl's movements with an intent eagerness, jealous lest any dainty morsel should find its way to the equally expectant lamb. The ship-master was angry, but it was noticeable that his face softened as he looked at the group.

"Them critters are in luck," he said. "The cow'll miss you sore when yon land's reached."

Aveline looked round with a smile.

"I shall be almost sorry to go ashore," she answered. "Only the touch of the firm earth will be good. I fairly long for the smell of the trees and fields."

"Poor lass! Poor little lass!" he said, and the answer seemed to Aveline strangely irrelevant.

She turned from the long-boat, and saw her brother standing in the rear of the captain. The expression on his face struck her with a sudden terror. She looked from one to the other.

"My lass, this 'ere young spark's a-shirkin' his duty, and I ain't a-goin' to stand by and see it," the captain said bluntly. "If I'd a-known before we started what kind o' stuff you and him was made of, I'd never a-made the bargain. But a bargain's a bargain, ain't it?"

"Surely," said Aveline. "And unless I am much mistaken, you will find my brother as ready to agree to that as yourself."

She drew herself up proudly, and stood facing him.

"You've got some pluck, my girl, blest if you haven't" said the ship-master admiringly. "It's a pity, a sore pity, that's what it is, and I take it there's shame as well as pity somewhere."

He jerked his thumb significantly over his shoulder as he spoke.

"I can't anyhow forgive myself that I ever had a hand in consignin' such a lass as you to bondage, though it was no business o' mine," he said.

"Bondage?"

Aveline spoke the word inquiringly. She did not understand what it signified in the present case, but her lips grew white.

"Aye, bondage! For there's nothin' else ahead of you, though he's tryin' to deceive you into thinkin' there is."

"Well, you've said your say. Now have you done?" interrupted Fulke, in a voice low and hoarse. "My sister is not unwarned. She will know how to judge of such words as these."

"Done? No, young man, I've not done, and I shan't be done, not until the maid understands the danger that's threatenin' her. And that she don't do yet."

"Truly I do not understand," said Aveline slowly.

"I'll warrant you don't," said the ship-master. "Little he's ever warned you, I'll be bound," — there was another jerk of the thumb, — "that when you set foot on yonder shore you'll be a free woman no longer. Maybe you've heard of a bond-servant?"

She looked at him with wide-open, horrified eyes, but she did not answer. Even now she did not understand. She appealed straight to her brother.

"Fulke, is this true?"

Her voice was lower than his had been, but there was in it something that compelled answer.

"No. It *shall* not be true."

She looked into his face. His eyes refused to meet

hers. If he had said "Yes," it would not as surely have driven home the conviction of his treachery. It was this, rather than the thought of danger to herself, that made her voice shake and her eye fall. She could not realize the whole of the catastrophe at once.

"I do not know what it all means," she said; and there was pitiful bewilderment in her tone. "There must have been some misunderstanding."

"Aye, that there has — misunderstanding enough," said the captain.

"And lies and misrepresentation enough," broke in Fulke, coming at last to his sister's side.

"Lies, are they?" shouted the ship-master, losing control of himself. "And I suppose that paper you signed before you ever set foot on the 'Bullfinch' as a passenger was a lie too, and you didn't covenant to secure the passage money to me by givin' me the power to sell, if necessary, a certain wench, by name Aveline Nevard, as a bond-servant in the colony of New York? You don't know nothin' about any such agreement, eh, young man?"

For answer Fulke lifted his clinched hand, but before he could strike, Aveline was in front of him.

"Stop!" she cried. "This is no way to settle such a matter." Then her eyes turned to the captain, and she said: "Sir, I know not what there is beneath this recrimination. I must talk with my brother. Rest assured that I will in no way be party to defrauding you of a penny that is your due."

She turned from him haughtily.

"Fulke, come!" she said.

She put her hand on his arm, and he was constrained to walk with her to the end of the deck. She had seen what, in his passion, he had not noticed — the approach of half a dozen passengers, attracted by the ship-master's loud tones and the young man's belligerent attitude.

A quarrel on shipboard was a diversion rare enough to present an attraction altogether its own.

Fulke would have broken away from her, but she stopped him imperatively.

"Don't leave me," she said. "We will go below in a few minutes."

She stopped to exchange a word with one of the sailors, and the clear, proud ring of her voice was borne upon the wind to where the ship-master still stood looking after the two.

"She's a spirited one, that she is," he muttered. "But she's got to come down. That young jackanapes is bound to lay her pride in the dust."

The ship-master was doggedly obtuse and uncommunicative beneath the questioning of the new-comers, and they were under the necessity of watching developments for themselves. All the conclusion they arrived at was that Fulke's face was red with anger, and his sister's whiter than usual. Before they could carry their observations further, the two disappeared down the steep stairs to the big cabin. Not that this was their destination. Aveline passed through it with her head held high, and her step firm, and Fulke was obliged to follow her. She went on to her own cabin, and shut and fastened the door. Then she turned and faced her brother.

"Now!" she said, and stood looking at him.

"You are distressing yourself for nothing," he said eagerly. "I would have saved you all this, but for that meddlesome fool."

"Yet there was truth in what he said?"

She spoke quietly.

"Truth? Yes. Of a sort. But not what he would have you believe."

"And this paper of which he spoke? Is it a fiction?"

He did not answer. In that moment the ship-mas-

ter's words, heard but not comprehended, stood out, and took hold of Aveline's consciousness: "When you set foot on yonder shore, you'll be a free woman no longer." They seemed to be beating against her brain with a force that was irresistible. For the first time fear for herself, terror at the possibilities of the future, took possession of her. The silence of the little cabin pressed in upon her. What was in store for her when she left its shelter?

"Why do you not answer?"

Fulke had never heard her speak thus; he had never seen her just as she was now.

"Because I despair of making you understand. I *did* give him the paper. There was nothing else to be done. But—I never meant it to come into effect. It never *shall* come into effect."

"In other words, you meant to cheat him through me."

"Nonsense! You don't understand. You might have some pity for the strait I was in."

"I thought, until now, that you might have had some pity for me."

Her voice was hard and cold.

"Aveline, be reasonable," he said. "What could I do? If I did not sail in the 'Bullfinch,' everything was lost. It was your money I was losing—"

"I wonder you should remember that," interrupted Aveline.

"And my own honour was at stake."

"It is not at stake now," was the quiet reply.

"I saw no way out. The ship-master suggested that one of us should agree to be security for his money. It was only a form. It will never be carried out. As soon as we reach the port of New York I shall look up Bennet, and get from him the sum I need. He has ample security in the cargo, which is in his name and mine

combined. All there is in it is the annoyance of your having to remain on the vessel as a pledge. I grant you that it is an annoyance — now. But if I had had my way, you would not even have known why you stayed."

"You were considerate—very," said Aveline. "And what was the hindrance to the carrying out of so well-formed a plan?"

"Nothing but an absurd quibble on the part of the captain. He chooses to think that Bennet will not be at the port, and that his money will not be safe."

"And if he should not be there?"

"He *will* be there. Why not?"

"Does his trading lie in the port of New York?" asked Aveline, with a sinking of heart at the thought of what it would mean to her if it did not.

"No — that is, I am not certain. Aveline, don't be foolish. If he be not there, I will find him. Trust me this once."

He took both her hands in his. They rested passive in his grasp. There was no answering movement, though his pressure was painful in its intensity.

"If you should not find him, the agreement will have to be carried out?"

Aveline was looking into his eyes with a gaze too penetrating for his specious arguments. It pierced through them all.

"Aveline, forgive me," he said. "I promise you it shall never come to that."

She turned away from him, drawing her hands forcibly from his grasp.

"Go away now," she said. "I — must have time to face it."

CHAPTER XI

FULKE turned at the door and looked back, half hoping Aveline would recall him, but she made no sign. She stood just where he left her, not stirring even when she heard his footsteps dying away. She was stunned by the greatness of the calamity. She had staked everything on Fulke's honour — and lost. She had been so sure that her sacrifice could result in nothing less than the bringing out of all that was best in him, that the outcome seemed to her incredible. There had been nothing to prepare her for it, though, looking back now, she remembered words that had awakened a vague uneasiness, a sense of insecurity. It was strange how they had failed to give her any real premonition of danger.

She had trusted her brother as none of the others had trusted him. Sir Julian had been wiser. From the first he had doubted the wisdom of her decision.

A new pang came to her with the thought of Sir Julian. To prove to her uncle that Fulke was made of nobler stuff than his clear-seeing eyes had discerned, had been one of the joys set before her, and the thought of the quiet, incisive tones that would call Fulke's action by its true name, and yet leave no excuse for quarrelling with the term, made the failure look doubly dark. To know that everybody would blame him, and not be able to challenge the condemnation as unjust, was a bitter ending to her dream. She had been very sure they were unfair to him — Sir Julian and Joan, both. Back to the girl's memory came Joan's warning, uttered that last morning at Eastenholme. After all, she had

known Fulke better than his sister had done. Joan had spoken truly — she had done wrong to trust him.

“Joan! Joan! If I had only believed you!”

The words did not pass her lips, but in her heart they were a bitter cry. A longing for human comfort, for the touch of loving arms, came with the thought of Joan, and following close upon it the consciousness how utterly she was alone. Fulke no longer counted. The terror of the future hemmed her in. She could not realize the evil, she did not know enough about it to picture it, but she shrank from it with the shrinking of a child that fears the darkness which it is yet obliged to enter. She felt that the future was even now overshadowing her, and she retreated a step, as though the walls of her cabin could keep it off. She could hear the wind whistling among the sails of the vessel, and was conscious that every puff was bringing the future nearer. She remembered how the ship-master had rubbed his hands that morning, satisfied that the breezes were to-day all in his favour. She found herself wondering what likelihood there was of a change of wind. Unfavourable weather might put off the inevitable.

America had suddenly become a great unknown desolation, filled with terrible possibilities. She had never thought of it so before. It had been to her a place where she and Fulke were to seek for fortune, and to gain — or at least Fulke was to gain — the stronger character that should make him a power in the world. As it came nearer she had found herself taking an interest in it, such an interest as had not seemed possible when she left Eastenholme. Now more than the first loneliness and desolation had returned. That was grief over loss of good, this was dread of on-coming, pressing evil.

Gradually the evil assumed more definite shape, growing into something she could grasp. A serving-maid!

The captain had spoken of it once — spoken of it in connection with herself. She had wondered what strange idea was in his mind. It did not seem less strange now that it had become something more than an idea. She thought of the maids at home, under Lady Betty's firm rule. A serving-maid in the colonies would doubtless lead a different life.

From that other term she shrank, refusing at first to give it place. It was a horror kept in the background of her consciousness, yet it never retreated beyond the pale of consciousness, and little by little it edged its way forward, till it claimed recognition. Once to the front, it stayed there, refusing to be thrust aside, and by its very enormity causing every other terror to grow small.

A bond-servant! Just how much the word meant she did not know, but it lost nothing in grimness by being vague. The ship-master was not a man of refined sensibilities, yet he had pitied her fate. Service might be honourable, but bondage — !

She threw herself upon her bed, and buried her face. It was burning, but her hands were cold. Wild visions of terror ran riot in her brain. She felt as if anything were possible, now that it had been possible for Fulke to sacrifice her, to sign away her right to the possession of herself. That was the one bit of certainty in the advancing host of possibilities. Fulke himself did not deny the existence of the agreement empowering the master of the "Bullfinch" to sell the services of one Aveline Nevard. And the ship-master was ready to insist upon the carrying out of the compact. Why should he not be? It had been made for the convenience of the signer. If the event proved satisfactory, it would be well; if not, the agreement was none the less binding.

Aveline lay long with her face hidden from the light. Again and again came the sound of the ship's bell, struck when the man at the wheel turned his half-hour-

glass. The watch had been changed just before she came below; now the six strokes of the bell told that six half-hours had passed. Two more and there would be a fresh watch. Not many more watches would be needed before land was reached. Great as was the disaster, it was yet coming momentarily nearer.

But the closing in of the forces of fear had another effect than that of overwhelming Aveline with their power, and shutting her up within their influence. Their very strength caused reaction, a strong rebound from despair. This future to which she was looking was too unreasonably full of evil to be a reality. It had not come yet. There was no certainty that it would come. Fulke declared it to be impossible. It was at least as likely that Roger Bennet would be at the port at the time when his cargo was expected to arrive, as that he would be up the country. And if not, there was the chance of inducing the ship-master to wait.

The hours of the afternoon had been scarcely less long to Fulke than to his sister. His thoughts were not more comforting, and his efforts to escape them were particularly unsatisfactory. His impatience drove him on deck, where he glared at the captain and growled at every one who was bold enough to address him. More than one tried the experiment, and more than one went off discomfited. Curiosity is a force strong enough to lead men to brave something worse than a savage rejoinder.

It was growing dark when Fulke felt a hand laid on his arm, and turned to find Aveline by his side. He seized the hand before it could be withdrawn.

"You are a good little sis'," he said. "I thought you would be sensible when you had time to think it over."

He was peering into her face in the dim light to see whether or not she had been as "sensible" as he desired.

"We may as well keep up appearances until the worst comes," she said.

"The worst will never come! It is simply impossible!" cried Fulke eagerly.

He would have been better satisfied if the impossibility had rested on a firmer foundation.

"Fulke, Sir Julian must not know of this. Whatever may happen, he must not know you have failed."

The reproach struck home, but the young man was only too glad to agree to the proposition.

"There will be no need for him to know," he said. "If only that rascally captain had kept a still tongue in his head, none need have known. I am distracted that I was forced to subject you to the fellow's insolence. There is nothing more in it than that, yet that is enough. I would have been bound myself, but then how could I seek Bennet?"

"Then you feared he would not be at the port?"

The quietness of her tone was broken by a quiver she could not control.

"It is just possible. But I shall seek him."

"And in the meantime?"

"You would have to stay on board. It is a horrible necessity — but I do not believe it will come. I am certain Bennet will be there."

And so Aveline tried to think, but her face looked worn and strained when the captain saw it in the morning. All she said to him was:

"My brother has explained matters to me. He did not wish to alarm me unnecessarily. I do not know how it will turn out, but—you shall not lose your money."

As for the ship-master, he kept his own counsel. Possibly he was ashamed of the bargain he had made. It was no uncommon one; the only singularity lay in the character and station of the girl who was affected

by it. He had taken over passengers who were glad to secure a home at the end of the voyage, and learn something about the land they had come to before they had to stand alone in it. To sell their services was sometimes — though the rule was far from being universal — to procure for them a home as good, or better, than that from which they had come. But this girl was of another type. In the set lips and studiously quiet tones he saw how much it cost her even to speak of the possibility that lay in the future. The ship-master was the victim of one or two vague impulses to let the money go, to tell the girl that he would trust to her honour, — her brother he left out of the account, — but they were too vague and fleeting to produce effect. The habit of a life is proof against an accidental leaning towards tenderness. To make money and hold it, was, to the master of the "Bullfinch," the first duty of man — certainly of the man Captain Crandal, master and part owner of the "Bullfinch." To lose money was in his eyes more than a weakness — it approached very near to a crime. He was sorry for the girl, but, after all, a bargain was a bargain, and people must expect to keep it.

CHAPTER XII

THE ship had cast anchor in the night. The long sea-voyage was ended, and the Atlantic belonged to the past. Aveline stood upon the deck and looked at the land. This was America, and the old life was completely ended. Worse still, the new life had begun.

The passengers were all gone, in a hurry to exchange the vessel's planks for solid land. Half the sailors were on shore. The ship was almost deserted, for unloading had not yet begun. All were free to go where they would—all but Aveline. She had not attempted to leave the ship. She was too proudly conscious of the hold the captain had upon her to run the risk of being topped. She would have been glad to go with her mother to look for Roger Bennet. The uncertainty would not have been as trying if she could have taken part in the search. But to ask permission to go was harder than to stay. For her—Aveline Nevard—to find it necessary to consult the will of another before she could step forth with the freedom enjoyed by the commonest sailor on board, was bondage enough in itself.

She stood proudly, all the more proudly that the shame of her bondage was strong upon her. The ship-master was not there. He had gone ashore an hour ago. Fulke had been the first to leave the ship, too impatient to stay a moment longer than was necessary.

"I shall soon set your mind at rest now," he said, as he stooped to kiss her.

He had been gone many hours, and each one had caused a deeper sinking of hope in Aveline's heart. If

Roger Bennet were in New York, why had not Fulke returned before this? He would not willingly keep her in suspense. She tried to find excuse for the delay, but the added hours called for more than one readjustment of her explanations.

She had always been strong of body and nerve, but the suspense of the last two days had proved a drain on the young life and health. A feeling of weariness and weakness assailed her as she stood facing the land, watching for her brother. Once she sat down on a coil of rope that a sailor good-naturedly moved to a convenient position. But she could not sit still. The time seemed longer, and she found it harder to breathe. She could see further standing, and it was easier to fight down her fear.

She was standing when she saw him coming. Her heart played her the trick of a coward, and began to throb unreasonably. She held herself very still, all her faculties engrossed in watching her brother. She could not see the expression of his face — he was too far off; but his step was slow. All the eagerness had gone from his movements. His feet seemed to drag. A sickening certainty that he had failed, that the worst had come, forced itself upon her. When he was near enough she read confirmation in his face. It was haggard and desperate. She went a step to meet him as he came on deck.

"Bennet is not here. I shall have to go to Albany," he said. Then, as her face grew whiter than before, he added, "Don't, child! It is not as desperate as you think. He is to be found. He *shall* be found."

He grasped her arm as he spoke. The marks of his fingers remained. He was speaking under strong excitement. For the first time he owned to himself that his sister was in danger. He was thoroughly roused now, desperately roused. Aveline stood and looked at him,

the horror in her eyes leaving nothing to be said in words.

"Here's Captain Crandal," said Fulke hurriedly. "I must see him and explain."

"Don't go. I — am frightened."

Aveline stretched out her hand. He caught it, and drew her to him.

"Poor little girl!" he said. "I never thought it would come to this. But you must not despair. We shall find Bennet yet, and Crandal must wait."

"Will he?" asked Aveline, clutching desperately at the hope.

"Of course he will. Come on, we'll ask him now."

He kept his arm about her, and drew her over to intercept the captain as he stepped aboard.

"Hullo! Found your man?" he asked.

"No. He is up the country."

"So I heard. Expected he would be. Well? What next?"

"I must go and find him."

"Where to?"

"This place called Albany. He is there."

The captain whistled.

"Very well," he said. "And my money?"

"You shall have it as soon as I get back."

Another whistle.

"How long will it take me to go to Albany and back?" asked Fulke.

"Depends on circumstances. There's a sloop going in two or three days. With favourable winds you may get back inside of two weeks."

"And you will give us time?" said Aveline, lifting a white face to his.

He answered by another whistle, a long doubtful note.

"Think what it means to me," she pleaded. "To you a few days more or less cannot mean much. Your

money is safe, for — I suppose — you can make it of my services in any case."

A slight flush came to her face as she forced the words from her lips.

"Time? Yes, I could give you time — all there is of it," said the ship-master sulkily. "But I don't know as that'll help you much. I ain't expectin' to stay here more than two or three weeks to take in cargo — three at the outside. It's all waitin' for me, and when it's aboard I've got to sail. And before I sail, this matter's got to be settled."

"But you will give us the three weeks?" said Aveline, catching at the hope his words contained.

Again there was that long whistle. It seemed to the girl that it pierced through brain and heart.

"And sell your time on the last day? What chance do you think I should stand of doin' that? Purchasers don't come every day, and 'tain't exactly likely one will be on hand right to the minute. No, young mistress, it's got to be done when I can find a customer. But, look you, I'll do the best I can for you, and get the highest price that's goin' for your labour. I'll look out for you as far as it can be done, and not risk the money. I can't say fairer than that."

Aveline grasped the ship's rail to steady herself. Water and sky were one blur of swaying whiteness. She could not see the captain's face — that was part of the blur.

The ship-master had been looking out towards the sea, examining the small craft near at hand, gazing anywhere, except at the girl. Now something impelled him to glance furtively at her.

"Heavens! if this isn't the hardest job I've done in my life!" he ejaculated. "See here, my lass. I can't stand seein' you look like that, and you one of the pluckiest wenches I ever come across. I'll tell you what I'll do.

I'll give you a full week from now before I take a step to sell your time. That'll give you a chance. Like as not this young man will be back again before a customer appears, and if one should come, I'll put him off to the last moment possible. I don't say I'll lose the sale. I can't afford that, but I'll do anything but lose it. Come now, I can't say no fairer, can I?"

Aveline did not answer, but she held out her hand to him. He took it in both his big ones, and held it.

"Couldn't you take some of the cargo? I'll make it right with Roger Bennet," said Fulke.

"Young man, we had that over before we started," was the answer. "I ain't got no right to touch that cargo, and more ain't you. I know Roger Bennet. He's a man of business, and don't allow no tamperin' with his affairs."

"But you must know that I am his partner? Surely he spoke of me?"

"Aye, he did. And he said you was a stranger to him, or had been till a week or so before. He counselled me to look after things a bit, and if he wasn't in the port of New York, to see everything put on the sloop for Albany. *That* I'm goin' to do. But if you think that what I've seen of you has given me any reason to trust you specially, I shouldn't mind bein' told just what that reason is. You might think it unnecessary to be straightforward with me, same as you did with this poor lass here, eh, young man?"

Fulke suppressed an answer it was not wise to utter. His face reddened, and his hand shook.

"Why, you may be tradin' with the Far Indians, or in any other outlandish part, before I come again, and then I may whistle for my money," continued the captain.

"Then there is nothing left for me to do but hasten to Albany," said Fulke, trying, for Aveline's sake, to speak calmly.

"Nothin', as far as I can see."

The young man stood for a moment looking from the captain to his sister. She did not see the look. She did not see anything just then. It took all her strength to bear the shock.

"Come," he said. "If that is how things are going, it's no earthly use to stand here longer. I must make preparations for the journey. I shall depend upon you, Captain Crandal, to see that the cargo is put aboard the sloop. *That*, at least, is in your agreement."

"Aye, that's in the agreement, and you'll find Geoffrey Crandal a man of his word every time. Them as know him can answer for that. He don't do no double dealin' himself, nor yet let nobody else."

The ship-master turned and went about his business, but Aveline stood holding by the rail. There was the same blur of sea and sky before her eyes. There seemed nothing solid left in the world.

"Come, child, I cannot leave you here. I must see about the unloading of the cargo, and the transfer to the sloop. Possibly persuasion may have more effect on her skipper than it has had on Crandal, and I may induce him to hasten his departure. Thank goodness, I've enough money to pay for the trip. Before I return I shall have seen Bennet."

Fulke stepped forward briskly as he spoke. He was trying to divert his sister from the one idea that had taken possession of her. Her face frightened him, it was so pitifully white and set.

She did not respond; she had not even heard him. He put his arm about her, and forcibly drew her away from the rail. She transferred her hand to his arm, and clung to that. He led her to the steep stairs, and then lifted her, and carried her down. The weight was not enough to account for his staggering step. Contact with that limp form brought home to him the cowardice of his act. He had purchased his own safety; he was at

liberty to go where he would, and to win fortune in this land; and he had made her the price of his freedom. It was the work of a scoundrel, and he had never meant to be a scoundrel. Over on the other side of the sea, when he had that long talk with the master of the "Bullfinch," the plan had seemed the best under the circumstances. Now that it had failed, he could see the criminal folly of it.

"Aveline, say that you forgive me."

He was bending over her as she lay in her bed. He had placed her there without opposition on her part. She looked at him as if trying to take in the meaning of his words.

"You will not get back in time," she said, the thought that possessed her finding expression.

"I shall. I *will*, if mortal power can accomplish it," he cried.

"You must not go until you have found out just what it means," she continued, "what it is to be a bond-servant. I want to understand — to know exactly what is before me." Her voice had grown firmer. "It is easier to face anything you know, even when it is terrible, than to meet an evil that to you has no limit."

"I don't want you to face it," said Fulke desperately. "In all probability it will never come."

"I cannot help it. I think about it, and picture horrors that — perhaps — do not exist."

"You would be better not to think at all," he said. "There is every likelihood that I shall be back before anything happens."

"But you will find out — what steps will be taken, and what will be the result? Don't stop till you know the worst. It is no use putting it off now."

He looked at her steadily. Facing the worst was exactly what he did not wish to do. But he promised. And very much against his own inclination he put his

promise into action that same day. For his sister's sake he forced himself to talk quietly with the captain.

"What am I goin' to do?" replied the ship-master. "Nothin' but what's right and honest. I'll be as kind to the girl as I can. There ain't no great hardship in puttin' up a notice or two in the city that the service of a girl of — how old is the lass?"

"Not yet eighteen," responded Fulke, with a groan.

"That the service of a lass of eighteen is for sale. That's all there'll be to do at the start. When a purchaser comes, you may rely on me to do the best I can. The higher the price I get for her service, the fewer the years she will have to serve to cover my money. I'll bargain for a good home for her, and bind her mistress hard and fast to behave right by her. That's what I'm goin' to do, and if you ain't satisfied with that, you've only got yourself to blame."

The thought of Aveline kept back the hasty words that rose to the young man's lips. He even condescended to ask advice as to the best way of finding Roger Bennet. With the consequences of his mismanagement before him, he could not rely as confidently as usual on his own wisdom. The only hope for his sister lay in the speedy meeting with his new partner. He set frantically about the task of superintending the removal of the merchandise to the waiting sloop, in his haste even going to the length of transferring some of it with his own hands. Anything was better than sitting still and watching Aveline. The girl had recovered so far as to be on deck again, but the slowly dragging footstep was so unlike her light, quick tread that he never heard it approach without feeling a sharp sting of remorse.

It was the night before the sloop sailed. Fulke was standing with one of Aveline's hands in his. He had drawn her close to him, and she had laid her head on his

shoulder. The fear of losing her was stirring in his heart. When he returned, would she be here?

"Aveline, I shall never forgive myself," he said, and she felt the heavy breath that was almost a sob. "There's one thing about it: they are all justified at home now. I have turned out as bad as they predicted."

"Poor boy!" she said gently. All the hardness had gone from her voice. "You will have the chance to disappoint them yet."

"Yes, and I have bought it by taking every chance away from you," he said passionately.

"Then make the better use of it," she replied.

She had never seen him quite as penitent before. He even refrained from finding excuse for himself. In the face of the evil he had wrought, he was silent. He hovered round Aveline, afraid to take the final step that should leave her alone to meet the danger. Even after he had gone on board the sloop he made an excuse to return. It was only to strain her to him and whisper, "Courage, dear. I'll be back before it is too late," and to say to the ship-master, "Put it off to the last moment possible. If you keep her safe for me, I'll make it worth your while on my return."

When he was gone Aveline began to count the days, staying her heart with the hope that help would come in time, and holding on to every one of the five times twenty-four hours that were hers of a certainty. Beyond them lay an interval in which she must hold herself ready to exhibit her attainments and qualifications for service to any would-be purchaser of the same, and further ahead still — Fulke, or bondage.

She took to watching the winds closely, greedily drinking in the breath of the south breeze, turning her face towards it, and blessing the rough playfulness with which it made free with her person. She saw some small sailing craft spread their sails and race past before it in the

direction in which her brother had gone, and she took heart, and sent a thought to the future that lay on the further side of this interval of fear. But when the wind sank to a dead calm, her heart felt dead too; dead, but full of unrest, like a soul that has lost the body, and found no renewal of life. She would pace up and down the deck, in the still July air, oppressed with a feeling of suffocation. Usually she sat with her face turned seaward, gazing wistfully across the water to the quarter where lay home and safety. Of what lay landward she tried not to think. It took all her courage to meet the fears of each day.

When strangers came aboard she took refuge in her cabin from their curious glances, for the consciousness was always present that before long they would see her name posted in some conspicuous place, and would remember that they had already cast eyes on this stranger in their midst, who was waiting their will, or the will of some other who could afford to pay the money which should make her his bond-servant.

There was no apparent change in her when the days of grace were ended, only, every morning, when the light crept in through the porthole, she steeled herself to bear the possible shock, and every night, when the city had grown as still as her own Eastenholme, she recorded one more day of danger passed. The captain never returned from a walk on shore without being aware that her eyes, which had grown deep and dark with longing, were searching his face to find what they most dreaded to see. At every return she was looking for confirmation of her fears.

It was on the afternoon of the fourth day, when she was sitting in her usual position, looking out to sea, that she heard the ship-master's step, and turned in time to meet his eye, and catch an expression on his face that had not been there before. He walked away abruptly, and

assiduously employed himself in another direction, but his movements were too studiously unconcerned to set her mind at rest. He did not approach her again, nor appear to notice her, but that night she did not count the days that had passed, nor congratulate herself on another added on the side of safety.

She was not surprised when the captain left the vessel early in the following forenoon, nor unprepared for his return with a stranger. She did not rise, as was her rule, to find privacy in her cabin. She sat still, awaiting his approach, for she was sure he would approach. Even in the agitation of that moment she was astonished to see that his companion was a man, young and well-dressed, though not of the type of any of the young men she had seen before. He was not a beau, after the fashion of her brother, nor did he resemble the young sons of country squires who resided near Eastenholme. He was no working-man, in the sense in which Aveline used the term, yet he looked as if he could guide the plough or wield the axe with the best of that class. So much Aveline learned at a glance; then her eyes went seaward again, while she fought against the deadly fear that overpowered her.

There was no trace of it when she turned at the captain's greeting.

"I have brought you a visitor, my lass," he said, "one that, maybe, you'll not be over-pleased to see."

Aveline rose slowly and stood before them, her face white and haughty, yet touching enough in its forced calmness to drive the speech from the lips of young Geysbert Feljer, as he essayed to make the acquaintance of the serving-maid he had come to inspect. It could not be said that he altogether failed in the inspection, for if his tongue refused its office, his eyes made up for the defection. The captain also had become slow of

speech. The two men stood before the girl silent, while she waited for them to speak.

"There is the lass, and I'll wager the like of her will never fall in your way again," said the ship-master at length. "Young maids of her stamp don't come over in every ship."

"My mother is in need of a serving-maid," said the young man, addressing Aveline in a voice that was not ill-pleasing. She could not complain that the tone was lacking in respect.

Aveline inclined her head.

"Captain Crandal tells me that you — that your services are at his disposal."

"He speaks truly," was the answer, given in a calm, proud voice.

"I could wish that my mother had been here to talk with you herself," continued the young man. "Doubtless it would have been more satisfactory to both. But she is now at the manor house, and I must even decide for her."

"Would it be impossible to communicate with her before you come to a decision?" asked Aveline. "I would fain gain time before I am bound to service. In a week my brother will probably return, and then it may be unnecessary that such a step should be taken. Yet I would not defraud Captain Crandal of that which is his just right, by unduly putting hindrance in the way of an arrangement," she hastened to add.

"Nay, nay, my girl, I'm not afraid you'd do aught but what was fair. If everybody was as honest, there'd be naught to say," broke in the ship-master, in a voice which sought to make up in sound what it lacked in ease. "There's no need to be in haste, but it will do no harm for you to look at one another, and this young man can take stock of the bargain he is like to get, supposin' it doesn't slip through his fingers in the meantime."

The stranger hesitated.

"There would not be time to hear from my mother," he said. "I have only a few days left to stay in the city. By the look of things I think it would be wiser to return without the maid. To serve one woman at the expense of another is to add little to the sum of happiness."

The face of the ship-master clouded.

"There will be others who will be less scrupulous," he said bluntly.

"Nay, sir, I would not have you think entirely of me," interrupted Aveline. "I wish to do that which is right. The money is due to Captain Crandal, and he is anxious to secure it. But if you could give me time — leave the matter unsettled as long as possible — it would be a great boon."

"I will do that willingly enough," was the answer. "But the thing is not altogether at my disposal. I go up the river with the next sloop, and that will be in five or six days at most. What I don't take with me then must be left behind for good."

"You'll be leavin' behind a bargain that won't go beggin' long," said the captain testily. "But take your own way. I sail myself in a week from to-morrow."

"I don't deny the bargain," was the rejoinder. "Yet, if I had known, I doubt whether I should have sought it. My mother has long spoken of securing the service of a white maid, and your notice made me think that her wish might perchance be gratified. We have slaves in plenty, but she desires to have with her a strong, useful wench, who should serve about her own person, and be trained by her to oversee the ways of the household. I doubt whether she had in mind a — a maiden such as this. Yet the exchange may prove a good one. Were I making the choice for myself, I think I should under-

stand the points better," he added, with an unmistakable look of admiration.

"Well, young man, as far as I can see through it, your good mother wants exactly what I can supply her with," said the ship-master. "The lass is not fit for rough service—I grant you that. But the service you need is precisely what she can render. You told me yourself, my lass," he continued, turning to Aveline, "that the superintendence of the wenches was not beyond your powers?"

"True," said Aveline. "I am not unaccustomed to the care of a house. The maids at home are well-trained, but they need a guiding hand, and under my aunt's direction I have had experience that should make me of use in the overseeing of a household."

The young man looked at her curiously, but his hesitation was gone.

"Look here, Crandal," he said. "If anybody takes her, I do. That much you may consider settled. We'll arrange the terms between us, and then let it rest. The day before the yacht sails I'll see you again. If she then desire to engage with me, she can; if not, my mother can very well await another opportunity."

They went away together, but not before a word or two of low-spoken thanks had repaid the kindness the young man felt peculiarly willing to shew. He found himself becoming momentarily more eager to secure this serving-maid for his mother, and the captain had little difficulty in making a satisfactory bargain.

As soon as they had left her Aveline went below. Her step was firm, and her brain clear. It had come—the thing she had dreaded. She possessed herself no longer. At that very moment the captain was selling, and this stranger was buying, her freedom. True, there were five days before the sale would be consummated, five days in which to let hope and fear struggle together, and

one or other die a violent death. Bond-service looked very near and very real at last. It had overtaken her, and she was looking it in the face. The vagueness had gone from it, and it had become a definite thing, but with the coming of the reality the indefinable horror had fled from it. It was a sorrow, a bitter pain and humiliation, but it was a thing to be borne.

CHAPTER XIII

“**H**O! Put back there! Ho! Hendricksen!”
The sloop on which Fulke had embarked was already in mid-stream, with wind and tide in her favour. The skipper looked back towards the slip, and a broad grin illumined his face.

“Hi, you! You’d better hurry. We’re going up with the tide,” he called.

The youth he addressed was the foremost of three. He had come to a stand at the edge of the slip, while the other two were yet stretching their legs in the effort to lessen the space between them and the river.

“Put about and take us aboard,” cried the spokesman imperatively.

“Not I. You’ll have to row for it,” shouted the skipper, putting his hands to his mouth, and causing his lungs to do duty in a manner that sent the sound well out across the water.

“Put back, or we’ll make you roar for it,” called the youth.

“All right. There’ll soon be distance enough between us to make roaring a necessity,” replied the skipper.

The belated passengers looked after the retreating sloop, and then hurried along the bank of the river and jumped into a boat. It required some exercise of muscle to reduce the distance between the boat and the sloop, though the skipper presently shortened sail out of consideration for the pursuers. His broad face grew broader with merriment as the boat came alongside.

“What means this unseemly haste? I swear we were not more than an hour behind the prearranged sailing time,” cried one of the three, by way of salutation.

They scrambled on deck, their first business a survey of the passengers, with most of whom they appeared more or less familiar. Fulke held himself aloof. He was in no mood for the making of new acquaintances, and the noisy hilarity of the travellers grated upon him. The late-comers, having exchanged greetings with the company, stood so near to his elbow that he could hear every word they spoke. Not that he was much the wiser for the hearing, since the conversation was carried on in Dutch, of which language he knew nothing.

"A pretty young man," began the most youthful of the three, without looking in Fulke's direction.

"Pretty, do you say? He looks savage enough to put the scalps of the wild men in danger. I shall take the first opportunity to warn my friends among the braves to look out for the mighty hunter of scalps, for he is in their midst, with a frown huge enough to darken the sunshine."

"Nay, no scalp-hunter is he. The dear boy is suffering from an aching heart. He has not seen his mammy for an age, and his eye is dark with unshed tears," commented another.

"Who is he?" was the next question.

"Don't know. The son of his mother."

"Where is he going? Esopus or Albany?"

"Ask him," suggested the oldest of the three.

"Ask him yourself."

"Very well. I'm willing."

"Look out for your scalp."

The young man left his friends, and took a step forward.

"Do you disembark at Esopus, or go right on by the sloop?" he asked, addressing Fulke in sufficiently good English.

"I am bound for Albany," was the curt reply.

"You are? Then we are all for one port. Intend to stay long?"

"Until my business is finished."

"Another element of similarity," said the young man, with mock seriousness. "We are expecting to do the same. Only as our business usually lies in the northern portion of the province, it is not liable to be finished at any very early date. Does this afford a further point of resemblance?"

He put his questions in the gravest possible manner, looking at Fulke placidly the while. His last inquiry remaining unanswered, he proposed another.

"Are you acquainted with any one in our city?" he ventured.

"Which do you call your city?" asked Fulke shortly.

"Albany, my good friend. The city of the fort, and the friend of the Five Nations. Albany, to be sure."

"In that case you can possibly tell me of one Roger Bennet," said Fulke, his manner growing less constrained, and a trace of eagerness appearing.

"Ho, ho! Now we are coming to it. We have found bait," said the young man, in an aside to his companions.

"Roger Bennet? And are you a friend of our trader, Roger," he added in English, "or is it but a matter of business that brings you hither to look up a stranger?"

"Nay, Roger Bennet is no stranger to me," said Fulke. "But of his present whereabouts I am ignorant. I would give much to know just where to go to meet him."

"It cannot — nay — that is impossible," said the other, looking long and critically at the Englishman.

"What is impossible?" asked Fulke.

"That you could be the partner of whose coming Roger spoke. A partner in his trading ventures, he said, but — to judge by your appearance —"

"Who asked you to judge by my appearance?" demanded Fulke testily. "Judging by your appearance it would be easy to deny that you were a man of sense, yet the judgment *might* be incorrect."

The other took the retort good-naturedly.

"Then I am to infer that you *are* the partner of Roger Bennet?" he said.

"You can infer what you like," was the answer. "It won't alter the fact, nor make me less or more his partner. I expected to meet Bennet at the port of New York. His absence is exceedingly unfortunate."

"Ha! Yes. I understand. The 'Bullfinch' was in betimes. Roger was not expecting her for a week or two yet. He could not get away so early from his trading. Since you are yourself a trader, of course you know these summer months are the time in which the warriors of the Five Nations seek our city to dispose of their pelts. Our traders are then not at liberty to be gadding abroad."

"Then I shall surely find Roger Bennet at Albany?" said Fulke, with a strong sense of relief.

"Sure is not the word for the movements of our friend Roger," said the young Dutchman. "With him a man is sure of nothing but uncertainty. He had but a few more natives to expect when I left the city. If they have already visited him, he may be away seeking scattered bands, for he trades with others than those of the Five Nations. These seek Albany, as a rule, but those have sometimes to be sought, and Roger is not a man to lose trade. It was the impossibility of leaving in July that kept him from coming to see about his cargo. So much I know from his own lips."

"And if he should have left Albany, will it be easy to find him?" asked Fulke, his hopes damped by the explanation.

"Maybe yes, and maybe no. What do you say,

Claes? What will be the movements of our friend Roger when his Albany trading is over?"

He turned to another of the young men, and soon the four were in earnest conversation. Fulke learned more about Indian trading than he had expected to know so soon, but he learned nothing about Roger Bennet's movements that could remove the uneasiness from his mind, or make him feel less of a culprit than when he turned his back on his sister, and left her to face alone the result of his folly.

The three young men from Albany were disposed to pursue the acquaintance. A stranger was a novelty and when once the ice was broken they found Fulke more approachable than they anticipated. In the time that followed, the acquaintance ripened into intimacy for a Hudson-river sloop was not big enough to allow men to stand off very far from one another. Moreover, though he had been at first repelled by their light merriment, Fulke found his companions useful in ridding him of the company of his own thoughts. Their careless hilarity touched a chord which had been silent since the night when he and Wyville quarrelled. There was a waking up of the old desire for excitement, a rebound from the pressure that had been upon him for the last few weeks. He had not escaped his fears, but he was turning his back upon them, and trying to ignore them.

The voyage was a slow one, and while the sloop lay becalmed, Fulke had more than sufficient opportunity to go ashore and inspect the land. It was the evening of the fifth day from starting when the vessel cast anchor but a few hours' journey from Albany. Wind and tide were unfavourable, and the skipper was cautious enough to wait for the light.

All day Fulke had been running away from the thought that the limit of Aveline's safety was reached,

that to-night ended the week during which the master of the "Bullfinch" had promised to remain inactive. His inward uneasiness drove him to seek diversion in the company of his new friends. They sat late on deck, talking and joking, but, late as it was, sleep was not quick in coming when Fulke turned in. Would Roger Bennet be in Albany? And if not, what then? He set his teeth together as he thought of Captain Crandal's haste to be gone, and of his determination to secure his money before he sailed.

Fulke had been the last to leave the deck, and he was the first to seek it again. Here he had, at the least, the chance of escaping communion with himself.

"Hullo, Fulke! Come to rouse up that laggard of a sun? Your eyes look constraining enough to draw him from his bed a full hour earlier than usual."

Tunis Halenbeeck stuck his head above the stairs, and took a leisurely survey of the deck.

"Oh, I'm tired to death of this sleepy old sloop. She's crawled up here like a snail. Thank goodness, there'll be something to do beside eating and sleeping when we get to Albany," said Fulke.

"Wait till we're there. We'll soon give you a taste of life, my boy," responded his companion.

"I doubt not there will be life enough when I get clear of this wretched vessel," said Fulke. "I have myself a considerable cargo on board, to the unloading of which I must attend."

"Ah! Indian goods?"

"Principally."

"And they are consigned to — whom?"

"Roger Bennet."

"That is well. It may save trouble. Our city is jealous of outsiders, and allows no stranger to intermeddle with her trade with the natives. To barter with them is her exclusive privilege, and she holds to it.

Roger Bennet is of ourselves. He resides in Albany, and has become one of us."

"It was for that reason the cargo was put in his name," said Fulke. "He said that it would be wiser thus to do."

"Aye, and he was right. And you — you too will have to be one of us if you would become an Indian trader."

"I am willing," said Fulke. "Roger Bennet averred that he could arrange it. I am at present in great straits in a matter about which I must see Roger. Afterwards I shall be free to take any necessary steps."

"That is — Ah! Who comes yonder?"

Both faced about to get a better view of a canoe that had shot into sight, half a mile below the sloop.

"Some one that wants to go up with us," said Tunis.

The sloop was about to make sail, and the occupants of the canoe were putting forth their strength to come up with her before she started.

"Pouwelyn Swart and Arent Segersen, as I live," said Tunis.

Everybody was on deck by this time, watching the approaching canoe. As it came alongside, two young men scrambled aboard and secured the boat.

"Thought we should overtake you," said one. "Hullo, Tunis! Got back from New York?"

"When did you come down?" asked Tunis.

"Yesterday."

"Then you can possibly tell me whether Roger Bennet is yet in Albany," said Fulke. He was in a fever of impatience to know his fate — or, rather, Aveline's fate.

The young man shook his head.

"Ten days too late," he said. "Roger went off trading that long ago."

For the next minute Fulke heard nothing of the talk that went on around him. He was trying to collect his senses, and gather together his resources.

"Do you know in what direction he has gone, and how soon he is expected to return?"

He broke in on the conversation, quite unaware that he cut short an interesting item of news.

"Who? Oh, Roger Bennet. I don't know anything about his plans. He's a little close, is Roger."

The break in the talk closed up again, and the gossip went on.

"He has? Well done, Roeloff Jansen! Deceived us all, for once. For my part, I could have sworn he was not going to be married till winter."

There was more talk, and loud laughter. Then came an outburst of merriment.

"Good! We'll all be on hand. That's too good a chance of fun to be left till cold weather."

Then they lapsed into Dutch, though, if Fulke had been listening, he might have heard his own name. He was not listening. At one moment he was wishing himself back in New York, cursing his folly in leaving Aveline entirely unprotected, and the next planning a rapid pursuit of Roger Bennet. But beneath all his hastily constructed plans, and through all his frantic declarations that he would accomplish his object yet, reason was steadily protesting that the last hope was gone.

The sloop was nearing Albany. The company of young men grew more hilarious.

"Come, Fulke," said one, "we will drink to your luck on our shores, though, to judge by your face, one might think that you and luck had had a quarrel."

"Truly luck is a delusion. The more you seek it, the closer it hides," said Fulke.

"Cease hunting for it, and take a good draught of our cordial, as good a specimen of Jamaica rum as skipper ever stowed away for cargo," replied Tunis.

They drank together of the West India rum that Albany traders found potent in loosing the tight grip the

red man was apt to keep on his treasured furs. Fulke quaffed it greedily. His hand shook. A desperate fear, a hunted feeling, as of one who has come to his last resource, and dares not own to himself that there is no way to turn, was assailing him. He drank every drop of the fiery liquid, and waited eagerly for more. When he lifted it again to his lips, his hand closed convulsively about the cup. A frantic desire for something that should remove this overshadowing dread, and give him hope even though no hope existed, was in his eagerness to swallow the draught. As the warm drops touched his tongue, they seemed to have potency to hold him back from the black desolation before him.

It had not failed, that warm, hope-imparting draught. His hand was growing steady, and his brain returning to its duty. Now he could think again. He turned to the young men, addressing them as a whole.

"If any of you could help me to find Roger Bennet, you would be doing me a vast favour, and putting me under an everlasting obligation," he said.

"If there's a man on earth that can tell you of Roger's whereabouts, it is Volkert Klaerbout," said one of the latest comers. "He will be in the city to-night, for certain. Better wait till you can see him."

"We'll get him to join us," said another.

"The very thing. Then you'll be sure of him. Trust Volkert for missing a frolic. Fulke, we want you to reserve yourself for us to-night," said Tunis Halenbeeck. "We've a little frolic on hand, a distinctive bit of Albany sport, and we want you for our guest. You London fellows think you know all about fun, I doubt not, but I'll wager you've never been in as pretty a piece of fun as this. True, it is best enjoyed in winter, and is now sport out of season, but if folks will go and get married suddenly, and set up housekeeping in the summer, we must stretch a point in their favour."

"Nay, till I have seen Roger I have neither heart nor time for sport," said Fulke.

"Hang Roger! You'll not find him the quicker for prating his name from morn till night. Your best way of finding him is to come with us. There you will meet with Volkert Klaerbout, and when our sport is well under way, and supper is in prospect, we will discuss the best means of going in search of him. You may trust me there is no better way."

Fulke hesitated. He cared nothing at that moment for their fun, but anything was better than waiting idly for the morrow. He was alone in the city, and its ways were strange to him. Without some help, his chances of speedily finding Roger Bennet were small.

"Come, give us your promise. Throw off care and trust to chance. Roger will be found none the sooner for seeking him with a long face."

Fulke wavered. 'Throw off care! Why not? If nothing could be done that day, he might as well throw off care as carry it. Carry it! He had carried it till he was weighed down, spent with the effort. And what had he accomplished? Who could tell whether, when night came, and tongues were loosened, when men grew friendly over the feast, he might not find a chance to enlist one or other of his new acquaintances on his side? He might even borrow—but here he stopped. His pride was up at arms against asking strangers for such help. And yet, for Aveline's sake—

He would let the matter rest. But he would accept the invitation, and if he accepted, he would be no kill-joy. He *would* throw off care. There was that to be had which would make it possible.

CHAPTER XIV

IT was a hot July evening, and Albany was in its usual evening position—outside its doors. The town cows had come home—unattended, for Albany cows of the year 1701 had imbibed too thoroughly the self-helpful character of their colonial surroundings to need the assistance of a driver to bring them to their respective milking stations. They had started in a long straggling line from the common pasture outside the town, and the tinkling of their bells had warned their owners that they were ready to be milked. No good *hausvrouw*, however, had felt it incumbent upon her to look after any one of them. It would have been an entirely unnecessary proceeding. Every good Albany cow stopped in a sensible manner at the tree which overshadowed the front porch of the particular dwelling to which she belonged, and began critically to crop the grass that grew along the street, turning her head lazily as one and another of her companions passed beyond her in sedate march to some other tree by some other door. Since well-nigh every house in Albany possessed a cow, and every cow could lay rightful claim to a tree, and every tree sheltered a porch, there was a long line of cows, under a long line of trees, in the long street that lay parallel with the water, and from which the gardens sloped back almost to the river's bank.

The musical sound of the milk falling into the respective pails had long ago ceased, and now the city cows were contemplatively chewing the cud, and taking part in the general reunion, for old and young Albany occupied the seats around the stoops, in close proximity

to the overshadowing trees, and friendly converse, informal and unrestrained, took the place of the day's labours.

Nobody was in a hurry to bring the resting time to an end; that is, none but a certain company of young men, who were in haste to carry out a little plan of their own, in which the silence of night was an essential element. But the evening was drawing on, and the moon was about to set a good example and retire for the night, warning honest citizens to go to bed. One by one the seats upon the stoops emptied, and porch after porch settled into quietude.

Along the river, at the back of the houses, the stillness of night prevailed, or seemed to prevail. If one had listened carefully he might have heard a footfall now and again, and once or twice his ear would have been greeted by a smothered laugh.

"The turkeys won't be in as prime a condition as if we'd waited for winter, but Roeloff's anger will well pay for the loss of turkey flesh," said a voice out of the darkness.

"He'd be on the lookout then, but now he'll be as unsuspicious as a baby till he finds his best bird missing, and knows we have had a fine supper at his expense," was the chuckling response.

"Look out, Fulke!" said a voice that broke the silence again. "There's a post there. Here we are. Next garden belongs to Roeloff. Now for sport, and the exercise of skill."

The speaker emerged into a more open space, and the light of the stars disclosed a figure not unlike that of Tunis Halenbeeck. Three other youths were there, but they kept in the shadow.

"Now look alive!"

Four pairs of legs climbed the fence that surrounded the garden, and four figures crept stealthily up towards the outbuildings belonging to a house from which the

lights were disappearing. Only one burned when they reached the end of the garden.

"Here's Pomp coming to see to things for the night, and make sure the turkeys are safe, always provided Roeloff's got any turkeys here at this time in the year," said Tunis. "Now, Fulke, you and I will make the venture together. You understand? A young pig, or a fat turkey. Anything you can lay your hands on quickly, and if you're caught, you take what you get, and say nothing about it."

The company divided, and Fulke and his companion lay low in the shadow, watching their opportunity to slip into one of the buildings. A sturdy negro, carelessly swinging a lantern in which a tallow candle burned with a dim light, was seen advancing towards the sheds. That he had not waited for the legitimate hour to begin his night's slumbers was evidenced by the sleepy movement with which he fitted a key into the lock of one of the doors.

Of all the buildings belonging to his master, none were locked save those which sheltered the turkeys and the pigs. These particular possessions were acknowledged to be in danger up here in the small city of Albany. They had enemies alert and cunning. Not the red men. With wild birds in plenty in the forests, these had no designs on the citizens' poultry or pigs. The danger lay less in greed than in the love of sport. These members of the animal tribe afforded scope for the enjoyment of a special form of amusement that derived its charm from its peculiarly risky character. Not that summer was the chosen season for indulging in this essentially local sport. Winter had always been the critical epoch in the life of the Albany turkey and roasting pig. But there are occasions when even custom may be expected to deviate from its ordinary path; therefore Roeloff secured his doors.

For this young man had married a wife, thus quitting the ranks of Albany bachelors, and his pigs and his turkeys were fit prey for the youths with whom he had often gone turkey-hunting around forbidden premises, but whose practices he had abandoned forever. For him the sport was a thing of the past. To steal out some cold dark night, and prowling round a luckless householder's outbuildings till a favourable moment gave access to pig-pen or turkey-roost, and then to seize turkey or young pig, and with it creep safely away to enjoy the stolen dainty at a city tavern, and sit far into the night feasting and gloating over the chagrin of the outwitted fattener of the feast, was to be his happy fate no more. As a married man he had abjured such juvenile folly, but in abjuring it he had transferred himself from the ranks of the turkey catchers to those of the turkey furnishers. For if the unmarried men of Albany ate turkeys on dark nights, the householders of Albany fattened the turkeys for the feast; and as a married man Roeloff was now a householder, and the owner of pigs and turkeys. Nothing was more likely than that an early visit would be paid him — hence his precautions.

Negro and lantern disappeared within the building. Only a faint glimmer shone out through the open door.

"Now's our time," whispered Tunis. "Follow me, and look out."

Fulke could have obeyed the latter injunction better if there had been more light. He made a blind dash after his companion, and stumbled into a deeper darkness somewhere, he did not know where. Certain unmistakable evidences of the proximity of that indispensable colonial possession, the pig, greeted the intruders. To make assurance doubly sure, a genuine grunt was heard.

"All right," whispered Fulke's companion. "We're in luck. I can hear some juveniles over yonder. A

good roaster is what we're after, and we'll have it, when that rascal Pomp's out of the road."

Pomp was to all appearance in no hurry. The lantern he had hung on a post threw a weird light on his dark features. The long shadows advanced and retreated as the negro changed his own or his light's position. Once or twice he came dangerously near the boards and casks that sheltered the watchers. Pomp was a young man, as young as the master he served, and the youths who were hiding near him. He was young enough to enter into the spirit of a piece of mischief, and just now there was in his eye a twinkle that was not called forth by the healthy specimens of the pork family to which he was ministering. He was surely unduly long about his task, and unusually solicitous for the welfare of his charges, for after every possible duty was done, he stood leaning over the rough boards, looking down into the pen, with that same twinkle in his eye.

"Ruin take the rascal! What's he stopping for?" muttered Tunis.

The negro might have been finishing his interrupted nap, so still was his figure, but his eyes shone with that same appreciative light. Pomp was surely not asleep. He went away at last, carefully and ostentatiously locking the door behind him, but to the disgust of two other watchers without, he opened no more doors. If there were turkeys on Roeloff Jansen's premises, they were destined to stay there in safety that night.

"Now's our opportunity," said Tunis. "Thank goodness, the fellow's gone at last!"

To select a pig in the dark, and forcibly persuade the same to leave the bosom of its family and allow itself to be hoisted over the high boards which fenced it in, was an undertaking that demanded dexterity.

Fulke grew momentarily wiser on the subject of the muscular and vocal powers of that little-appreciated animal.

"Do you always earn your suppers as hard as this before you have them?" he asked, as he straightened himself for a greater effort. "Truly, it may be a good winter occupation."

They bent again to the task, and lifted the squealing youngster over the pen.

"Here, hold on to him a minute, while I put this sack over him to deaden his screeches," said Tunis.

Fulke essayed to "hold on," and the pig endeavoured to make off. It was a trial of strength that bade fair to leave victory on the side of the quadruped.

"Hold on! Don't let him go, or we shall be chasing our supper in this dark hole for an hour," cried Tunis.

Fulke endeavoured to get a firmer hold of the animal's hind legs, and Tunis stooped to draw the sack over the squealing victim's head. At that critical moment the door of the building was swung open wide, and the owner of the prospective supper appeared in the doorway, holding his lantern high, that its rays might penetrate the interior.

"Horrors! We're caught. Quick, Fulke! Up with you on that partition. There's a trap-door above."

Tunis had grasped the front legs of the pig as he spoke. Now he darted behind the casks, and in a moment was on the partition, intending to escape through an upper window to one of the other roofs.

"Come on! We'll save our supper yet."

He was half-way through the opening, and Fulke did his best to follow, while at the same time he held on to the hind legs of the wriggling, struggling, twisting specimen of the pork family. Tunis pulled above, the pig jerked between, and Fulke hoisted below. It was a lively time, and to add to the liveliness, the owner of the animal advanced to the rescue, armed with a stick that looked capable of becoming an important factor in the proceedings.

"Drop that pig!" shouted the Dutchman, in a voice suggestive of no mean bodily strength.

He gave another proof of lustiness in the resounding thwack with which he brought his weapon across the legs just within reach, on the top of the partition. Fulke had full proof of the strength of a Dutchman's arm, and the solidity of a Dutch cudgel, in the next moments. The low, guttural laugh of the negro, who was standing in the doorway enjoying the success of his timely warning, was especially exasperating to him in his present undignified position. He made a frantic effort, in the shape of a mighty spring, and had succeeded in getting one leg over the roof, when, unluckily, the pig also nerved himself for a gigantic effort. The double movement was too much for Tunis, standing under the sharply sloping roof above. It jerked the animal's legs out of his grasp.

"Look out! He's slipping," he cried.

A sudden rushing sweep of soft flesh, and the pressure against him of a weight that bore him back irresistibly, were the sensations that came to Fulke with his companion's words. Then there was the sound of a thump on the floor below, a frantic momentary effort to regain his balance, and a second heavy thud. This time it was not the pig that fell.

"Has he gone?" whispered Tunis. "If so, come on. We can slip down off the next roof."

The only answer was a succession of sounding blows, as of a stout stick stoutly used. For a moment Fulke lay still, stunned by the fall and the shower of blows. Then he realized his position, and in a strange fantastic way the words of Tunis darted through his brain.

"If you are caught, you take what you get." He was taking it, sure enough.

"Pomp, you rascal, come here and hold the lantern,

so that I can see to give this fellow an appetite for his supper."

The words were in Dutch, and the speaker never stopped his vigorous wielding of the stick, while Pomp, rolling and shaking with laughter, advanced and raised the lantern from the floor, where his master had hastily deposited it. Fulke had made two or three futile attempts to rise. In the first place, the Dutchman's foot was planted firmly on his victim, and in the next, the sharp pain in the leg that was doubled under him warned Fulke that the fall had cost him something more than a few bruises. Now, as the light showed the face of his captor, he made another desperate effort, and partly raised himself. The uplifted arm of the Dutchman dropped.

"Why, in the name of wonder, who is the knave?" he cried. "He's not one of us."

"One of you! The fates forbid!" Fulke burst out wrathfully. "Of all the ridiculous pranks to invite a stranger to share in, this beats the lot. Here, if you're satisfied with the execution you've done with that club, lend me your hand. We can fight it out another time. I doubt there's mischief enough done for one night."

The young householder drew back in speechless astonishment. He had expected to see one of his old cronies, or if not a particular associate, at least a resident of Albany. But this intruder was a stranger, and by his speech it was evident he was not a Dutchman. Roeloff had wielded his weapon manfully. He had felt that his reputation was at stake. To catch the disturbers of his turkey-roost or his pig-pen, and give them according to their deserts, was accounted an act of valour, a fit beginning for the life of a fully fledged citizen. To let the depredators escape with their prey was to give them the chance of a laugh at his expense. He had caught one of them, and he had meant to show his prowess. Now he was somewhat disconcerted. He

stooped, and tried to help Fulke to rise, but after the first attempt, the young man dropped back upon the floor.

"It's no use. The leg is broken," he said.

Then a figure suddenly dropped through the trap-door, and sprang easily down to the floor.

"Fulke, old boy, what is it?" said Tunis. "Can't you get up?"

"Do men walk with broken legs here in Albany?" asked Fulke coldly. "We are not possessed of that accomplishment in England."

"Are you sure it's broken? You may be mistaken," remonstrated Tunis, who felt in a measure responsible for the accident.

"Feel for yourself," was the curt reply.

But the touch of the young man's fingers called forth an exclamation of pain. Tunis looked at Roeloff in dismay. That young man was gloomily studying the situation.

"You've made a pretty mess of your frolic this time," he said. "I suppose there's no help for it; we shall have to carry him into the house. Here, you, Pomp! Go and fetch me a broad, short board."

They both looked with some compunction on the face of the stranger, white and drawn with pain. The fracture was a bad one, and before the bone was set, Fulke's reputation for quiet endurance had been fairly established. Nevertheless, when it no longer took all his strength to master the sharp physical pain, the signs of suffering continued unabated. He ought to have been resting after the strain of the last hours, but he lay chafing and fuming. He could appreciate now the feelings of a wild animal caught in a trap. Every faculty was alive and suffering. His leg lay a useless weight, rendering him practically as helpless as itself. He had promised Aveline that he would return in time to save her. Now he must lie here like a log, while she waited

and watched for his coming day after day, and at last had to face— He raised himself on his elbow, and called desperately to his host—host by compulsion, which was another cause of uneasiness.

"I cannot lie here," he said. "It is imperative that I should be back in the port of New York with the next sloop, and in the meantime I must meet Roger Bennet. There is that at stake which makes it of vast importance. Is there no way of seeing Volkert Klaerbout to-night? I was to have met him at—"

He hesitated. The sentence was awkward to finish.

"At the tavern where you were to go to feast on my pig," said Roeloff somewhat grimly.

"A curse on your pig, and everything connected with such folly," said Fulke. "I was an ass to have anything to do with it."

His host did not contradict him.

"But I must see this Volkert Klaerbout, and that at once," continued Fulke. "I might as well be buried alive as lie here with this leg a dead drag on me, while all the time the last hope is slipping away."

"You'll stand a fair chance of being buried, and that not alive, if you go on like this," said Roeloff. "As a doctor, which you say you are, you ought to know that excitement is the worst possible thing in a case like yours."

"Excitement!" cried Fulke, in a voice high-pitched and unnatural. "Would you keep cool if the—the freedom of one whose happiness was of far more consequence than your miserable life, depended on your movements, and you lay helpless as a baby?"

It ended in the looking up of Volkert Klaerbout. There was no quieting the excitement which had taken possession of Fulke by any other means than bringing the young man to his side. Roeloff went off grumbling, and was gone long.

"Here's Volkert Klaerbout, if that will do you any good," he said when he returned.

"Roger Bennet?" said the new-comer, in answer to Fulke's questioning. "It's little use putting yourself in a frenzy about him. You couldn't overtake Roger if you had three legs at your disposal, and all of them good for work. He'll be back here in five or six days, if things should go well. You'd have to wait till then in any case."

Five or six days! There was still a bare possibility of the money being in time. Roger must be induced to go to New York with it himself. Something must be done, *should* be done, when Roger came. Over and over, through the night hours, Fulke said it to himself, now counting the chances, now acknowledging that there were none to count. And in the gray light of dawn he was saying the words still, only the tongue that spoke them tripped, and made strange blunders, for the eye that looked into the surroundings of the new day shone with an unnatural light.

CHAPTER XV

CAPTAIN CRANDAL was in a bad temper. He swore at the seamen who were stowing away his cargo of tobacco and peltry, and quarrelled with the New Yorkers whose boats swept round too close to his vessel. He railed at the hot wind that blew from the south, and the sun that burnt and blistered the paint of the "Bullfinch," and set the captain to mopping his face with his sleeve. And after all, it was not the steady pouring down of the golden rays that gave to the master of the "Bullfinch" that feeling of oppression, and forced him to turn to windward in the vain hope of catching a breath of cool air. It was not the sun that was burning into the rugged heart, which was not all hardened, despite the greed of the captain's self-centred life, but rather the consciousness of a folded square of paper resting in the capacious pocket, well out of sight. That bit of paper might as well have been held up before his eyes, so persistently did the words it bore accompany and confront him.

He had done it — done the deed against which his heart had been giving vigorous protests these five days, the deed towards which his settled life principle of money-getting had been steadily driving him. The price of the passage of two adults in the good ship "Bullfinch" lay close to the folded paper. And yet Captain Crandal was not happy. Not happy! He came nearer being desperately unhappy than he could remember to have been for many a year. He swore a bigger oath by way of giving vent to some of his dissatisfaction, and then went and looked down into the vessel's hold.

"Hoist them chests on deck, will you, and look alive! Don't go to sleep there!" he shouted.

"Aye, aye," came from the depths, and one by one three strong oak chests were swung up, and the work of stowing away cargo went on.

It was not many minutes later when Aveline came on deck, and walked slowly over to where the big boxes rested. She stood looking down upon them, or trying to look through the blur of tears that came at the sudden contact with objects which were associated with the safe home-life. She had not seen those chests since they stood, packed and ready to be sent off, in the hall of the Great House. There was not a maid in the Great House whom she did not envy to-day.

"Feel about ready to claim your property, my girl?"

The captain's head appeared above the deck, and the remainder of the man followed the head out of the vessel's interior. Aveline raised her eyes, shining with tears, to the speaker's face.

"Nay, nay, lass," he said; "put a stout heart against sorrow."

The girl's lip quivered. The heart had need to be stouter than the one that ached so sorely within her, to be strong enough to meet the sorrow that was closing about her.

"I judged them chests had to be got ready to accompany their owner," said the captain. "I didn't flatter myself you'd affection enough for Geoffrey Crandal to be thinkin' of leavin' them behind as a mark of friendship."

The captain was making such a prodigious effort to be at his ease, that his uneasiness was apparent through every word.

The mistiness about Aveline's eyes cleared. She looked at the speaker fixedly.

"Was there any immediate need for bringing them up?" she asked, while a cold, creeping fear touched her heart.

"Aye, there was."

"When?" she said.

"In two hours."

"So soon!"

She stood looking in his face, not knowing that she was looking. She was thinking that the comparative safety of life on shipboard was over. The ship-master did not know what she was thinking. *He* was thinking that he wished himself well out of a business that was lowering his opinion of Geoffrey Crandal at every move. He shifted his position, with a view to getting out of the range of Aveline's eyes.

"Well, don't you want to know what a rare good bargain I've made for you?" he asked.

He was uncomfortably certain that the best would seem bad enough to his listener. She turned slightly, so that her eyes again rested on his face, but beyond that movement she made no answer.

"I never was much of a boaster," continued the ship-master, "but if there's a man on earth can beat Geoffrey Crandal at a bargain, I've yet to find him. Young Geysbert Feljer hadn't been dealin' with me long before he learned that to buy from Geoffrey Crandal the services of a maid who was thoroughly well able to turn mistress on occasion, he'd have to give in to terms that were to the advantage of the girl. Aye, and I screwed him up to my time before I was done with him. Not a day over five years have you got to serve, and you may thank Geoffrey Crandal for that."

"Five years!" Aveline echoed his words.

"Aye, five years. What better would you ask? 'Tis puttin' your services higher than the service of maid was ever placed in this land, I'll wager."

Five years! Just now it looked like a lifetime. Aveline could not see beyond it.

"And your money is paid? My brother is no longer in your debt?" she asked, after a long silence.

"It's all paid. You're out of debt now, both of you."

"It is at least a comfort that you have not been defrauded," she said, and she went to put together the rest of her possessions.

It was all over. There was no more any hope, but there had come instead the quiet of despair. With the certainty of the evil, there was deliverance from the sickening suspense of the last week.

Before the two hours had expired Aveline was on deck, awaiting her purchaser. She saw his eyes searching for her before he stepped on to the vessel's planks. He came over to her, and stood looking down upon her. He was tall enough to need to look down. There was something in his face beside admiration to-day. A certain critical scrutiny, a weighing of the points of his bargain, an unmistakable air of appropriating his possession — all these were apparent. But the admiration was none the less the predominating expression.

"Well, young maid," he said, in a tone that was purposely light, "and so your brother has not yet put in an appearance, and our good captain has deemed it necessary to come to a decision."

"You speak truth, sir, more's the pity," said Aveline.

"Pity for you, but right well I know there'll be them that will find it anything but a pity," he said. "And are all these chests to journey with us up the river?"

"They are mine," said Aveline, "and I know not where else to bestow them. I had hoped" — her voice broke for a moment — "I had expected that I should have kept house for my brother," she continued more firmly. "Their contents would then have been of service."

"Verily, it seems not improbable that you may be called upon to keep house for one more fortunate than your brother," said the young man. "The hearts of our youths are not proof against the charms of beauty."

The movement with which Aveline turned from him and looked out across the water might have been interpreted as simply a farewell gaze in the direction of her home. Geysbert Feljer did not, however, so interpret it. His next words were strictly in the line of business.

"How soon can you be ready to go on the yacht?" he said. "We have little time to lose."

"I am ready now," replied Aveline, turning again towards him. "I would not keep you, but I have one request that I would make, so that I may know what message to leave for my brother. When he shall return, with full ability to refund the money you have paid to Captain Crandal, could he — would it be possible to cancel this agreement, and give me my freedom again?"

She saw the shadow that came over his face, and noticed the harder curves about his mouth. His answer was not given to her. He turned to the ship-master.

"Nay," he said, "if that's how it stands, you'd better hand out that money, captain. I deemed you had full power to sell for the time agreed upon. What should my mother be wanting with a maid who would go from her before she had well learned her duties? Little sense would there be in taking this maiden up the river for the simple pleasure of sending her down again. If I buy a maid, I want a maid."

"And what more do you desire than the maid you've got?" asked the ship-master wrathfully. "As for the right to sell, I should like to know who has a better."

"But if this maiden would reserve the privilege of a release at any time she may desire the same, the purchase is of little value to me," said the young man.

"Yet I do not wish to press her unduly. This is a matter for her and you to decide between you."

"I am acting according to my agreement with her and her brother. Is not that the case?" asked the captain of Aveline.

"Yes; it is according to agreement, but —"

"'But' will not bring me my money," said the ship-master. "The question is, are you ready to stand by your brother's bargain?"

"I have no choice," said Aveline, "for surely I would not defraud you."

"There, you hear that. What more have you to say?" demanded Captain Crandal of the young man.

"Nothing," was the reply. "My girl, when you are ready, we will go."

His manner was gentle, as if he were sorry for the pain he was causing.

Aveline moved a step forward.

"Captain Crandal, you will let my brother know where I have gone," she said.

"Trust me for that. If I'm not here, I'll find the means to communicate with him right enough. You'll soon see the lad again, never fear. And when you want to know just what terms Geoffrey Crandal has made for you, give a look at this paper."

It was a copy of the terms of sale, the same obtrusive square of paper that had troubled Geoffrey Crandal from the moment it came into his possession.

It was inevitable that in accompanying her owner to the vessel which was to take them further up the Hudson, Aveline should interpret the curious glances of the strangers she met as signs of contempt for the bond-servant. They were free men and women, raised by that fact to another plane than that of the negro slave or the white bond-servant. Aveline knew nothing about their views on the subject, but she felt the sting of her bondage,

and her own sense of humiliation was enough to interpret for her the feelings of these comfortable-looking colonial worthies. Geysbert Feljer did his best to put her at her ease. They had some distance to walk to reach the spot where the yacht lay, and as they went he pointed out to her the notable features of the little city. It was not his fault that she could not forget her humiliation, but his efforts were sadly wasted. Aveline answered him quietly and intelligently, relapsing, however, the moment she ceased speaking, into the same hopeless quiet that was suggestive enough of despair to cause Geysbert Feljer some rather sharp twinges of compunction.

Her face had been very white, but when she followed him on to the yacht, a painful flush suffused it. Some ten or twelve passengers, bound for bouweries intermediate between New York and Esopus, were doing their best to interpret the situation. A young and beautiful girl — for there was not one who denied her the title — appearing in the company of Geysbert Feljer, was enough to set them all on the alert. Moreover, it was apparent that she was not there in the character of a visitor to his mother's home. The diffidence of manner, that accepted the position in which she was placed, and was careful not to step beyond it, was plainly mingled with a proud reserve, a holding of herself and her companion in check. The good folks felt that this was not the attitude of friendship, and if the girl was not a friend of the family, what was she? It was no wonder Aveline felt the question in every eye; the inquiry was too decidedly pronounced to pass unobserved.

There was more than curiosity in the skipper's broad stare. In the list of passengers permitted to pass up the river in his boat was the name of Aveline Nevard, bond-servant. Could this be the wench? He put the matter to the test.

"Getting home with your purchase?" he asked rudely.

The young man eyed him from head to foot. Then he turned pointedly away.

"You will find our river a different kind of stream from your Thames," he said, addressing Aveline, and he led her to the further end of the yacht. The skipper stared after them.

"Don't look as if she was much used to the duties of a serving-wench, does she?" he remarked to a bystander, but this time the words were spoken in the unknown tongue Aveline heard on all sides.

It does not take long for such news as the skipper had to tell to travel from end to end of a boat, and under the significant glances and open-eyed scrutiny it took all Aveline's self-control to hold herself erect, and preserve such composure of manner as should at least veil her humiliation. Every nerve was tingling with shame, but she forced herself to answer Geysbert Feljer's remarks, and to look up the river in the direction in which he pointed. The young man put himself very determinately between her and the passengers, studiously ignoring both the looks and words of the latter. Of the words he heard enough to make his manner anything but conciliatory when one and another accosted him. Their cool reception gave the homeward-bound colonists no encouragement to pursue the conversation, and soon the two were left in possession of the spot which Geysbert had chosen for Aveline.

She could not but be grateful to him for the trouble he was taking. His presence lessened her terror, and without reasoning about it, she drew from his manner hope for the future. He was as careful in making arrangements for her comfort as if she had been his sister, and by no word or look did he again lay himself open to rebuff. He was trying to allay her fears, and drive the

hunted look from her eyes. It was not till he had made every provision for her below, and had bidden her good-night with a courtesy in which she could find no trace of anything but kindness and respect, that he threw off the restraint he had put upon himself, and joined the company on deck. Then, when a bowl of punch had been prepared, and the men had stretched themselves on the deck in lazy enjoyment of the cool evening air, his tongue was less reticent, and he atoned for the chilliness of his former greetings, and vouchsafed to be communicative.

It was a hot night, and the supply of punch was unlimited. The stars were fading before the first streak of dawn when the men turned in, and the gentle wash of the water against the side of the yacht, as she lay awaiting morning and wind enough to fill her sails, was at last the only sound to be heard.

To Aveline the day which followed that dawn seemed interminable. She could not complain of any neglect on the part of Geysbert Feljer, but more than once she could have wished he had been less attentive. There was something in his manner that had not been there the night before, an intangible something, that was yet real enough and definite enough to make his attentions a source of uneasiness. Once or twice, as he persistently devoted himself to her, Aveline saw a broad and entirely undisguised smile on the lips of men with whom, a minute before, he had been in friendly converse. She could not help feeling that they were making merry at her expense, though she did not do Geysbert the injustice to believe that any such thought was in his mind. She was too little versed in the ways of the world to associate the punch-drinking, which still went on in a lesser degree, with his altered manner. She only noted the difference, and drew as far back from observation as possible, giving the young man no encouragement to remain near her. But when another night's sociability

had had time to produce its effect, even to her unsophisticated eyes it was an easy matter to read back from effect to cause. The potations were plainly telling on the young man. His tongue was loosed. Noisy hilarity had taken the place of his former quiet demeanour, and he no longer refrained from paying Aveline those direct compliments that had hitherto been held back by the restraining influence of her manner towards him.

Towards afternoon the sky became heavy with clouds, and when Esopus was reached, and the passengers who had not already disembarked took their departure, a heavy storm of rain and wind swept across the water, and threatening rumbles of thunder were heard in the west. Aveline went below, and waited in sickening dread. In a few hours the nearest point to the manor house would be reached, and the untried difficulties of her new position would meet her.

It was almost dark when the yacht neared her last stopping place. She had come beyond Esopus for the sole purpose of conveying Geysbert Feljer and his charge to their destination, and would, if possible, make the return trip before anchoring for the night. Aveline had not seen Geysbert since Esopus was passed. The rain was abating, and she wrapped a heavy cloak about her, and sought a comparatively sheltered spot on deck. There was more room to breathe up here; she felt less hemmed in and desperate. She stood leaning over the rail, her face hidden from any in the other part of the yacht. Weariness and the terror of the unknown were exercising their influence upon her. The darkness creeping over the world made its way further, and settled down upon her soul. Hot, hopeless tears fell unchecked, dropping down into the water. Heavy sobs, which she yet controlled so far that no sound reached beyond her sheltered corner, shook her. For the moment she had abandoned herself to despair. So

thoroughly had she given herself up to her sorrow, that she did not hear a step coming towards her retreat, nor know that she was not still alone, until a hand was laid upon her shoulder, and Geysbert Feljer stood beside her.

"What, tears?" he said, bending his head to look into her face. "Truly this is a shabby way to treat your new home, to come to it with those shining eyes all dimmed with tears."

She made him no answer, unless the turning of her head so that her face was hidden from him might be taken for a reply. He kept his hand on her shoulder.

"A pretty lass like you should never wear a long face," he said. "Come now, give me a kiss as a reward for my promise, and I swear your life at the manor house shall be one that befits so handsome a maid."

He made a movement as if he would take that for which he asked.

Aveline drew herself away with so sudden a wrench that his hand fell from her shoulder. She moved off a step and confronted him. The tears were gone now. He had no longer need to complain of the lack of lustre in her eyes. They were blazing with a light that the storm cloud and night shadows combined could not hide.

"Sir," she said, in a voice that quivered as much with anger as with the sorrow hardly yet under control, "I know not what your action implies. If you would show your scorn of the bond-servant, you may have the pleasure of knowing that you have succeeded as truly as you desire. Yet in your triumph it might be as well to remember that the serving-maid is a gentlewoman born. As your mother's maid I will endeavour to do my duty, but I do not judge that the conditions of my service give you the right to forget what is due either to yourself or me."

For the moment Geysbert Feljer was at a loss for a reply. He was abashed and disconcerted. Had he been in the fullest possession of himself, he would not have ventured on such familiarity with one who was comparatively a stranger, even though she happened to be in the peculiar position in which Aveline was placed. He had not meant to offend the girl. His admiration was genuine, and he had but been trying to show it in as open a manner as he desired. He had many a time stolen a kiss from a pretty girl without meeting with rebuff. But if his brain had not been befogged with the effects of his liberal imbibing of punch, he would have remembered not only that this girl was a stranger, but that her dependence, which gave him the opportunity to be thus familiar, made it inevitable that any undue liberty should be to her suggestive of insult. As it was, he was divided between repentance and vexation.

"Nay, you are unjust," he said, after an awkward silence. "It is not every pretty lass who would feel herself insulted because a man praised her face."

"Hullo, there, young man! You and your new possession had better be preparing to get ashore, instead of choosing dark corners to exchange confidences in."

The skipper laughed at his own joke, and poked Geysbert in the ribs. The young man turned savagely upon him.

"Get out of the way and attend to your sailing, and let my concerns alone, can't you?" he said. "Who asked you to put your word in, confound you!"

"Oh, ho! That's how the wind blows, is it?" said the skipper, and went off.

Geysbert followed him out to the wind-swept side of the deck, and Aveline stood trembling with indignation and dismay. Almost immediately there came the bustle of making the landing, and then the putting ashore of

her boxes. At that point in the proceedings Geysbert came again to her side.

"It is raining more than is pleasant," he said, "but we shall have to be going. The skipper is in a hurry to put back to Esopus. It is not a long walk to the house, but the road will be bad."

His manner was constrained. Aveline could not decide whether he was angry, or simply disconcerted. He helped her off the boat, saw her possessions covered from the rain, and told her he would send one of the negroes down to bring them from the river. Then they started out into the darkness, taking with them a lantern which the skipper had placed at their disposal. The night was very heavy, but now and again a flash of lightning lit up the scene, and showed Aveline the bridle-path along which they were walking.

"This is the nearest way to the house," said Geysbert. "There is a wagon-road, but it is not as direct, and to-night the mud would render it well-nigh impassable."

The walk was not really long, but it seemed so to Aveline. The manor house stood on an elevation scarcely a mile from the river, while some of the out-buildings approached much nearer. It was at one of these that they stopped. The doors were open, and there were lights enough within to reveal its cavernous depths. To Aveline, whose ideas of a barn were those of her English home, there was something weird in the high, dark structure, within which she caught glimpses of horned heads when the light from the lanterns fell on the cattle in their stalls. Black faces peered out into the darkness, and the rolling eyes of the foremost negro were especially prominent.

"I will give directions concerning the bringing up of your chests," said Geysbert. "In the meantime you had better step inside."

He motioned her towards the lighted interior, but the

stare of those rolling eyes was too much for her courage. She wanted to face as few strangers as possible to-night.

"Thank you, but I would rather stay here," she said.

"As you will," he replied, and it was plain that he interpreted her refusal as a reflection upon himself.

He was gone but a minute.

"I have just learned that my mother is not at the manor house," he said, returning. "She has gone further up the country to attend a funeral, and will not be back before to-morrow. I am sorry, for your sake. Not that it need distress you at all. If you will come in and wait for a few minutes, I will take you to the house of Ryseck Schredel, who will make you quite comfortable for to-night." Then, noticing that she still hesitated to enter, he added shortly: "You can go on there at once, if you so prefer. You have but to follow the path to yonder house where the first light appears. That is Ryseck Schredel's. She is the only white woman among our servants."

The suggestion of womanly sympathy and protection gave Aveline a longing desire to hasten forward to the spot where a friendly light shone into the night. It was but a short distance ahead, and she had no fear of losing her way.

"If you have no objection, I will go on," she said. "I am very tired."

Once beyond the barn, however, she began to realize that there was a difference between plunging alone into the darkness, and having her footsteps guided by the lantern which Geysbert had carried low for her benefit. She more than once found herself in a mud-hole before she stood on the doorstep of the house for which she was bound. It was a small house, its gable-end to the road, and from the step where she stood the light was no longer visible. Her knock had to be repeated before the welcome sound of footsteps told her that Ryseck

Schredel was coming. A sudden upspringing of hope came to her as the steps drew nearer. There was in them at least the promise of shelter from the night and the storm, and protection until the morning. She breathed a sigh of relief when the door was opened, and she saw a stout comfortable-looking Dutchwoman, who carried a shining brass candlestick, holding it high that the light might more effectually reveal her visitor. Her face was a study as she stood steadily regarding the storm-beaten figure upon the threshold. Rain and mud and weariness were not sufficient to hide the girlish grace of the figure, but taken in connection with the fair, frightened face, they were startling enough to account for the astonishment which manifested itself in the woman's broad features. She made no sign of welcome, but stood with her candle on a level with her head, and stared at the girl.

"I had expected to see Mrs. Feljer to-night," said Aveline, in a voice low and faltering, "but Mr. Feljer tells me she is away, and he bade me ask you to allow me to stay with you until her return."

She looked into the woman's eyes with a smile that was pitiful in its appeal for help and sympathy, and advanced a step towards her prospective hostess. Only one step, however. Before she could take another the strong hand of the Dutchwoman grasped her shoulder, while the pale blue eyes glittered and snapped with anger. A deluge of words, all in the tongue that seemed to Aveline one of the terrors of her lonely situation, fell upon and about her, and the candle was thrust forward so that its rays shone full upon her feet, all coated with great cakes of mud ready to fall at the next step. On and on rushed the stream of words—a torrent apparently without end. Once Aveline made a frantic effort to explain, but her attempt was borne down by the steady outflow of language, and she could only stand,

frightened and desperate, waiting for the deluge to cease. Instead of ceasing, however, it grew louder and more vehement, and at last the big hand of the Dutchwoman made a sudden forward movement, and Aveline found herself pushed off the threshold, and out into the mud of the road. A further outburst of those pouring, pelt-ing words, no one of which conveyed to the frightened listener any meaning beyond angry denunciation, fol-lowed her into the darkness.

The irate Dutchwoman had thrust her out with such force that Aveline had some ado to keep herself from fall-ing. As the undiminished flow of her wrath poured out into the night, the girl retreated in dismay, stepping ankle-deep into the mud of a roadway which led past a number of buildings dimly visible ahead. Their walls made a denser shadow across the path, and there were now no more lights to be seen.

Pulling her feet with difficulty out of the mud, Aveline hurried on, bent only on getting beyond the sound of the angry voice at the open door. She turned her back on it, and literally ran away, where, she did not know. She could not feel safe until she had rounded the corner of a building, and the light from the Dutchwoman's candle was no longer to be seen. True, it was darker here, but it seemed beyond the reach of immediate danger. When she had gone thus far Aveline stopped, for she had no idea what to do next. The rain was falling heavily again, and a distant rumble of thunder had a menacing sound. There was no shelter where she stood, and she moved on in sheer desperation. It seemed scarcely possible to be in a worse predicament than the one in which she found herself. Perhaps some-where there might be a sheltered spot where she could creep in from the rain, and wait till morning. She could just discern the roadway, and the dark forms of buildings that bordered it. Soon she passed beyond

these, so far as one side of the road was concerned. It seemed to her that she was walking along by an open field, but there was not light enough for her to be sure. She put out her hand and felt a rough post — a part of the fence. Just then a flash of lightning disclosed to her her position. She was, as she had supposed, at the edge of an inclosure, — a small paddock it appeared to her, — but her eyes opened wide with horror as the outline of that field became visible. It was fenced with — what? She shuddered and drew back. Her hand had been touching one of those posts. Was there nothing but terror in this place?

She retreated a few steps, and then stood still. What next? The Dutchwoman was dangerous, Aveline felt sure of it, and to Geysbert Feljer she could not return. The remembrance of his looks and words was yet too fresh. The darkness and storm were dreadful to her, and this new terror was about her, possibly nearer to her even now than she knew, but she could not go back.

Again there was a flash of light, and Aveline's eyes turned towards the inclosure. She uttered a sharp cry of terror, for to her, in the gleam that came and went almost before it had revealed the weird scene, it seemed that the place was fenced with skulls. They had the white, bare look, the dead dryness of bones that have been so long exposed to the weather that the very suggestion of life has passed away from them. Their regularity added to the horror. There had been one on the top of the post her hand had just touched, and there was one on every post as far as her eye could travel in the momentary survey. They seemed numberless, those ghastly heads — an array of huge, fearful monsters of death. How came they there, and what did they betoken? A new horror seemed to meet her at every step.

Her cry of fear had been the result of overstrained

nerves. She repressed it almost before it was uttered, but the answer came at the instant, and came in the form of a short, sharp yelp, sounding from somewhere out in the darkness. It was followed by the rushing sound of an animal bounding towards her. Aveline stood still, uncertain whether to regard the approach of the dog as a new danger, or the sign of coming help. He might be savage, and she was a stranger.

While she waited, she discerned a tiny point of light, that sprang into existence from the distant gloom, and seemed to be coming towards her. It gave her courage to speak to the dark object that with a bound and a growl was upon her. At the sound of her voice the growl subsided, and the dog came to a stand, but so close to her feet as to give her a shuddering sense of insecurity. The animal might partake of the generally dangerous character of the place, and be meditating a covert attack. Her voice was low and appealing. It reached other ears than those of the dog, though it was too faint for the words to be distinguished. A sharp whistle summoned the animal from his self-imposed guard, and he went bounding back to where the point of light was resolving itself into the rays from a lantern carried in a man's hand. Aveline awaited its approach. The sense of human companionship made the lonely night less terrible, yet, as the light came nearer, she could not forbear turning her eyes once more towards those white skulls, as one by one they flashed into sight, and faded again into the general blackness upon the passing of the lantern.

The stranger approached. He lifted his lantern so that its light fell upon the figure of the girl standing in the rain.

"What are you doing here, my girl?" he asked, in a tone that, though authoritative, was not unkind.

"I was seeking shelter, but — these —"

Aveline shuddered, and glanced again in the direction of the field.

He did not understand. He was too much occupied with looking at her.

"You are — you must be — the serving-maid of whom my brother spoke," he said.

Aveline inclined her head. He noted the gesture, and wondered.

"Your mistress," — he hesitated — "my mother, is away, but that should afford no excuse for a young maid wandering thus in the darkness."

She lifted her face, and the light of the lantern fell full upon it. He had not seen it clearly before. Her eyes were dim with tears that did not fall, and her lips trembled as she pressed them together to keep back the expression of her loneliness and fear. He uttered an exclamation of surprise, and his face perceptibly changed.

"You have lost your way," he said gently, "and the storm has frightened you. Come. I will take you to Ryseck Schredel. She will find you dry clothing, and in the shelter of the good woman's house you will forget the storm."

Aveline looked into his face. He was like his brother, but younger by some years, and there was an utter absence of that bold recklessness which she had come to fear in the other. Even in that first glance she knew that he would take no undue advantage of her position.

"Nay," she said, and there was a plaintive ring in her voice that to the young man's ears was an appeal for help, "it was from Ryseck Schredel that I was hastening when I came to — this dreadful place. Your brother bade me seek her, and I went. But she is a fierce woman, and her tongue is rougher than her hand."

"What! She laid hand on you?" said the young man.

"She pushed me from her door with force that almost sent me into the mire," said Aveline, with some indignation.

A glimmer of a smile played about the lips that quickly drew themselves into their normal lines.

"Ryseck was uncivil," he said. "Yet she is a good woman. Unwittingly you must have offended her, and I know to my cost that when once Ryseck's tongue is loosed, it can wag with energy enough to be a terror to the unfortunate offender. I will return with you, and explain. Possibly she knew not who you were, though my brother said that he had already dispatched one of the negroes to warn her to show you all consideration. I do not wonder that you were afraid. Surely it is a sorry home-coming to be thus lost in the storm."

"Sir," said Aveline, "would it not be possible to find some other shelter, some shed or outhouse where I should be safe until— Oh, I cannot go there again!"

Her self-control gave way. The thought of meeting that fierce Dutchwoman was too much for her shaken nerves. She clasped her hands in entreaty.

The young man showed signs of surprise, but his voice was, if anything, more gentle than before.

"You cannot stay here all night," he said. "There is no fit place to shelter you. Unfortunately my mother is away. Were it not so, I would take you at once to the house. But there is no white woman there, and you would possibly find more to fear in the faces of the negroes than in the sharp tongue of good Ryseck herself."

He stopped, and looked inquiringly at Aveline. She did not speak. A hopeless feeling, a sense of being hemmed in by fate, a conviction that there was no way of escape, was settling upon her. Black-faced slaves in the house, bleached skulls outside, and that old Dutchwoman, with her strong, aggressive arms and her

angry tongue, as the only alternative — it was a choice of evils. Just now, in the darkness and storm, the prospect looked equally uninviting on every side.

"Trust yourself to me. I promise you I will bring you to light and safety," said the young man, taking her hand within his own, and moving a step forward. See, the storm is coming up. You cannot stay here."

There was kind friendliness in the firm grasp of his fingers, and sympathy in his voice. Aveline surrendered herself to him, and he led her back by the way she had come, holding the lantern so that it revealed the deep pools and treacherous mud. The dog, obedient to a command from his master, followed soberly in the rear. Thus Aveline retraced her steps to the Dutchwoman's house. But not to the front door. Her guide knew better than to take her there. Even he would not be exempt from the outpouring of Ryseck's wrath if he should dare to set foot on her clean step. For it was clean again. Every trace of the mud from Aveline's shoes had been washed away. Ryseck had been down on her knees in the opening, scrubbing and wiping, till water, pure, clean water, without a trace of anything else, shone conspicuously on her step. The young man picked his way round to the back of the house, and stopped before the door of a shed. Even here he stood back as he knocked, careful lest his feet should touch the wooden step.

"Ryseck! Good Ryseck!" he called. He spoke in Dutch, and his voice quickly brought a response. Aveline could not suppress a shiver of apprehension as she heard again the heavy tread of the Dutchwoman, and waited for the door to be opened. But when Ryseck's eye fell on the girl and her escort, it had in it nothing of its former fierce glitter. She stood looking from one to the other inquiringly.

"I have brought you a stranger whom I found flee-

ing from us as if from a band of the wild men," said the young man. "She was wandering in the roadway, frightened and wet. I told her that from you she would receive as true a welcome as if my mother herself were here to look after her."

He smiled and looked towards Aveline. The woman answered him in vigorous style, and ended by pointing to Aveline's shoes. He shook his head, and said a word or two in response. Somehow, in his voice, Aveline did not think the strange tongue so outlandish. The Dutchwoman listened, and her face relaxed. A laugh began to play round the wrinkles of her mouth. She replied in a different tone. The young man turned to Aveline.

"You and Ryseck did not quite understand each other," he said kindly. "Our good Ryseck's objection was not to you, but to the mud you unwillingly brought with you. She is so thorough a Dutchwoman that dirt is to her something more than an abomination. Muddy feet are a sacrilege, especially on her front step, and — our roads *are* bad."

He glanced with a comical smile at his own feet, and then at Aveline's. Then he turned to the woman again, and apparently asked a question. For answer came another burst of words. He cut them short with a laugh.

"Will you let me help you to your first experience of Dutch customs?" he said, his eyes twinkling a little as they rested on Aveline. "Real Dutch, not altogether our colonial customs."

He stooped in the mud and rain, and began to loosen the shoes on Aveline's feet.

"You will be very welcome when you come without an accompaniment of dirt," he said. "And you must forgive Ryseck if she saw the mud before she looked at you. If she had looked further, I think she would have forgotten the mud."

His smile was so kind that Aveline's lips could not but relax.

"There," he said, when one shoe was ready for removal, "now if you will step out of this, and put the dry foot inside the house, I will set you free from some more of our New York mire."

The tense look was going from Aveline's face. When she stood inside, and looked down at her stockings and then up at the Dutchwoman, she could not forbear a smile. The woman nodded and laughed. She said something to the young man.

"Ryseck says that if you will stand just where you are she will bring you dry clothes," he explained. "Better let her have her own way. She will never be happy until she does. But you must not be afraid of her. Trust yourself to her. She is a good woman, if her tongue *is* terrible."

He had taken Aveline's hand again to help her out of the shoe. He retained it for a moment.

"Good-night," he said. "To-morrow the storm will have passed, and as for us, we shall not seem quite such heathen to you when you know us better."

Aveline answered him with eyes that were shining through the tears. But in spite of the tears she was comforted, and she was not sure that even to-night she thought them all heathen.

CHAPTER XVI

“**W**ELL, what luck? Are decent maids as scarce as ever?”

The speaker, a little, thin elderly lady, with small sharp features, and an eye that went to the heart of things at the first glance, alighted nimbly from her horse, waiting for no assistance from the tall son who came to meet her.

“Scarce enough,” replied Geysbert Feljer, looking down at her with a peculiar smile. “But you’ll have no further need to complain of their scarcity, at least for five years to come.”

“What? You have brought me one at last? And for five years? How — surely you have not been foolish enough to bring me a bond-servant?”

“And what if I have?”

“What if you have? Hear the boy! Truly a man’s head has less that’s useful in it than any other receptacle of the same size. Haven’t I told you over and again that I wanted a maid I could trust? Such a wench as you have brought may be well enough, but we’ve slaves in plenty to do the rough work. What should I want with a bond-servant, and for five years too?”

Geysbert laughed.

“Surely I’m between two fires,” he said. “There’s Helmer here vexing his soul that I have bought and paid for a damsel too delicately nurtured for contact with such rough mortals as ourselves, and you disturbing your peace of mind with the anticipation of a coarse untutored wench, fit only for intercourse with slaves. The next time I move heaven and earth to find me a

maid, I venture to predict it will be only myself I shall attempt to please."

"Helmer? What has he to do with it?" said the lady. "He has not been to New York to waste money over useless maids."

She spoke sharply, but she smiled as she met the eye of her younger son, who stood with one hand resting on the neck of his father's horse. The old man, for he was some years older than his wife, was taller than either of his sons. He rode a large horse, and the appearance of both horse and rider spoke much for the good cheer of the land. Pieter Feljer had been in his day a splendid specimen of Dutch manhood, and his day was not yet fully over. He was a trifle bent, a little less sprightly than in his young years, but he could hold his own yet with the later generation. His blue eyes were twinkling merrily at the encounter between Geysbert and his mother.

"Better look at the maid, and judge for yourself," he said, but his words were not in the language in which the others had spoken. Pieter Feljer was a Dutchman through and through, and though he could on occasion speak in the tongue that was gaining ground in the land, its sounds were not at home on his lips.

"Little good looking will do, since Geysbert has been foolish enough to pay the price," was the answer. "What the lad could have been thinking of to do such a deed is more than I can tell."

"Geysbert, tell your tale and done with it," said the younger brother. "What is the use of arousing fears that are without foundation?"

"Not I," said Geysbert stoutly. "I have been accused of folly. Let my action speak for itself. I'm going to fetch the damsel."

He started off with a swinging step that carried him rapidly down the hill upon which the house stood, and

left Helmer to explain or not, as he chose. The young man had not much to tell. He had found Geysbert particularly uncommunicative on the subject. When he left Ryseck Schredel's door on the previous night, he naturally sought his brother, anxious to learn more about the girl whose evident terror had appealed to him strongly. He found Geysbert out of temper, and not quite in a state to give a clear account of either himself or his charge. By dint of questioning he learned something of Aveline's story, but when he ventured on the opinion that it would have been more merciful to have left her where she was, Geysbert turned on him fiercely.

"Much you know about it," he said. "You'd be soft-hearted enough, I doubt not, to refuse the bargain yourself, and leave it to one who would know better how to use it. The girl may think herself fortunate that she has fallen into honest hands."

And then he went off in a rage, and Helmer had not approached the subject again.

Madame Feljer shook her head over the story.

"I doubt the foolish lad has made a sorry bungle of his bargaining," she said. "A pretty face, forsooth! 'Tis a steady, hard-working maid I want. A stuck-up manner and a handsome face will not bring me the value of my money."

"Nonsense! Give the lad a chance to show whether or not he be in the right," interposed her husband. "Surely it is one-sided work to judge him unheard."

It was not long before Geysbert returned — alone.

"Your curiosity will have time to sharpen itself," he said. "The fair maid is missing. She went out almost an hour ago, Ryseck says towards the river. Our new possession bids fair to afford some diversion."

He spoke lightly, but in reality he was not a little perturbed. He believed that Aveline had made an attempt

to escape, and he felt himself to blame. He did not doubt that he had been in part responsible for her terror the night before. He would have gone to Ryseck's house earlier had not pride stood in his way. The girl had refused his escort, and chosen to be offended at his advances. He had felt inclined to leave her to herself, to let circumstances teach her her mistake. Now he was vexed, and a little afraid — for Aveline's sake. He well knew that any attempt to escape could only prove disastrous to the girl herself.

"A pretty piece of business this!" said the little Dutch lady, with a keen look into Geysbert's face. "What kind is the girl, that she thus attempts to run off without reason?"

"Oh, the girl's right enough," said Geysbert shortly. "She has but taken fright at Ryseck's strength of lung. Ten to one she's not far off, and will be glad enough to return. But if not, so much the better for your peace of mind," he added slyly. "You will then not be troubled with a bought maid."

"Can you name the time when I shall not be troubled with a foolish lad?" said his mother sharply. "Go you and look for the wench, and bring her here to me."

Geysbert's face was not quite pleasant to look upon as he turned away from the house. He was vexed with himself, and therefore angry with Aveline. He passed several of the slaves, but he would not condescend to ask them whether they had seen the girl. If he had done so, he might have learned that he was going in the wrong direction. They could have told him, for Aveline had passed their quarters, walking away from the river. Such of them as were there had trooped out to look at her, their faces broad with curiosity.

As for Aveline herself, she had no thought of awakening either suspicion or curiosity. She had slept long, and, it seemed to her, late. The excitement of the night

had drawn on her resources, and nature was taking revenge. When she awoke, the sun was high, and she experienced the sensation of being abed in the middle of the day. It was not as late as that, yet it was late enough for breakfast to be over in Ryseck's kitchen, and for the good woman to be about her work.

Aveline's first impulse was to go to the window. In spite of her reasonings with herself, she expected to see some weird spot, where nature and man were alike savage. What she saw was a large roomy-looking house set on a hill. It stood at some distance from Ryseck's cottage, and was approached by a long grassy slope, broken with trees. The first impression it gave was one of openness. The wide piazza which sheltered its long front was deep enough for a dwelling place, and the broad hillside stretched from its door into cultivated fields, down to the level where Aveline knew the Hudson flowed, though she could not see it from where she stood. When she turned towards the back of the house there came to her a comfortable feeling of shelter. A low hill, that yet overtopped the height upon which the manor house was built, shut it in from the westerly winds, and formed a barrier between this cultivated spot and the great unbroken land lying far to the west. It was a wooded eminence that ran back towards the higher hills, a link between the cleared land below and the great stretch of forest behind and above. Of the forest itself there was no end. It started on the foothills, which seemed to surround the place, and mounted up and up till it crowned the mountain background of the picture. In spite of herself Aveline felt the peace and beauty of the scene stealing over her. Here, surely, was no savage land.

The picture showed no trace of life, until, as she was turning to go down-stairs, Geysbert Feljer came round the side of the house. An unacknowledged feeling of

disappointment came with the conviction that he was bound for Ryseck's cottage. Aveline had half expected, she could not have told why, that his younger brother would have been the first to greet her.

She went cautiously down the stairs. Ryseck Schredel, with her Dutch tongue, was still to her the embodiment of danger. She was not certain that she might not unwittingly commit some new and heinous transgression, and draw upon herself a fresh outburst of the Dutchwoman's wrath.

Ryseck was in the kitchen, apparently engaged in a careful search for some treasured but lost possession. Aveline's first impulse was to offer assistance, for the Dutchwoman was down on hands and knees, laboriously poking a sharpened stick into the cracks of the boarded floor. Before she could set foot on the threshold, however, Ryseck looked up and frantically waved her back. Then Aveline perceived that, although the Dutchwoman was searching for something, it was not for treasure. The good woman was only waging her usual warfare against dirt, trying to keep her portion of the world clean by poking out the dust that in minute portions had gathered in the cracks. The poking process was followed by a vigorous scrubbing with soap and water, and not until the last bit of floor was rubbed till it shone, did Ryseck look up and give the girl a welcoming nod. The nod was accompanied by a steady investigating gaze, a manifest weighing of the merits and demerits of the stranger.

Ryseck understood matters a little more fully than she had done over night. Philip Schredel, the stolid Dutch husband of good Dutch Ryseck, had been in the barn when Geysbert brought Aveline home, and Philip knew a word or two of English. Moreover, he was of an inquiring mind, and Geysbert's tongue was not altogether under the control of his brain that night. Therefore

Philip was able to tell Ryseck enough to make her desire to know more. She had only her eyes to depend upon, but Ryseck Schredel's eyes were inquisitors not to be despised. They told her the girl was beautiful, not with the beauty of the Dutch girls she knew, though her skin was as fair as that of the most renowned pink and white belle among them. This maiden was something more than fair. The delicate, clear-cut features, and the mass of softest brown hair, belonged to a head that held itself proudly. The girl was a beauty, so undeniably a beauty that Ryseck emphatically shook her head. What did young Geysbert want with a girl of that stamp as a maid for his mother? The good lady needed a maid who would be of use to her. As for this lass — Ryseck shook her head more decidedly. It was clear enough that she was born to be served, and not to serve.

Aveline felt the disapproval in that head-shaking. She drew herself up a little haughtily.

But the Dutchwoman's inquisition went further, even to Aveline's eyes, and then she forgot to shake her head, or to continue her scrutiny. She found so much to read in those big brown eyes. Foremost of all she saw the pride — a hurt, smarting pride, that came to the aid of and stood guard over all other emotions — and back of the pride a wistful patience, holding pain and fear in check, while far down beneath them all was a depth of loneliness that touched on despair. The Dutchwoman did not read all these clearly, but she spelt out enough of them to reach her honest, kindly heart, and she ended her scrutiny by taking the astonished girl into a pair of motherly arms, and planting a sounding kiss on her cheek. Then Ryseck laughed and released her, pushing her into a chair, and busying herself with setting breakfast before her.

It was after breakfast that Aveline grew tired of wait-

ing. Geysbert had not come, as she expected. But neither had Helmer. The sun was shining invitingly, and there was over her a sort of fascination, which drew her to the scene of her last night's terror. She stepped outside Ryseck's door — the back door. She stood there for a minute, and then turned towards the river. Some strange-looking objects had attracted her attention. Did these people delight in nothing but grotesque or weird arrangements?

The objects in question formed part of the end wall of a long building, or row of buildings. Afterwards, when she came to the front of the structure, Aveline found that it formed the slaves' quarters. Just now her attention was engrossed by what looked like an attempt at ornamentation. Some thirty-odd hats, — Aveline had the curiosity to count them, — their shapes betokening the various periods to which their better days belonged, occupied prominent positions on the end wall, to which their brims were affixed by nails. As though desirous of adding yet more to their ornamental character, the designer of the unique adornment had cut a round hole in the crown of every hat. The effect was peculiar enough to bring a smile to Aveline's lips as she strolled round the long, low building. At the sight of woolly heads and black faces in the doorways she quickened her steps, and, making a circuit, came out again into the road she had followed in the darkness of the previous night.

After all it was Helmer, and not Geysbert, who found the missing maid. In precisely the same spot where his dog Kip had come across her the night before, he saw her standing. Without giving the action a thought, Helmer came to a stand too. He forgot to move forward because he was fully occupied with looking. He could not fairly have been said to have seen her before. The light from his own lantern, and from Ryseck's sputtering tallow candle, had not been sufficient to show

fully the sweet girlish face, with features perfect enough for beauty, and not too perfect for that peculiar charm to which a little imperfection is essential. The colour had returned to Aveline's cheeks, and a half smile played on her lips. Her hand was resting on one of the self-same posts from which she had recoiled in horror the previous night, and her face was upturned towards — a skull. She had not been mistaken, yet she smiled. The light of awakened interest was in her face. For the moment she had forgotten herself and her fate, and it was upon the Aveline of Eastenholme that Helmer was looking. Not once had Geysbert seen her thus. Her eye swept round the paddock, the fence of which was uniformly ornamented with those white emblems of death. Already to Aveline they were speaking of life rather than of decay, for in and out, using the eyes for doors, came and went a colony of birds, too tame as well as too busy in providing for the families within, to pay any attention to the stranger. Every post was crowned with a skull, and every skull was the habitation of a bird family.

"You are making the acquaintance of some of our tenants, I see," said Helmer, when he had studied her face so thoroughly that he could not in all conscience watch her longer.

She turned hastily, and her acknowledgment was a mixture of womanly ease, born of the associations of her life, and a gentle reserve that feared to overstep the bounds of present circumstances.

For the moment Helmer experienced an unwonted sensation of rusticity, of being weighed down with colonial habits and surroundings. In spite of the awkwardness of her position, there was a grace, a high-bred dignity, about this maiden, that for the first time in his life brought home to the young man the consciousness that there was another circle than the one in which he

moved, and in which he held a recognized place. Who was she, this girl of whom he must think simply as his mother's maid?

"They are houses for the birds," she said, and her voice in no way detracted from the charm of her looks. "Last night —"

"You were startled by them."

A new light was dawning upon him. He thought he could better understand her fears.

"I would have explained if I had known," he said. "We must have seemed to you a set of wild people, since we thrust our — visitors — out into the storm, fenced our fields with skulls, and — were there any more dreadful things we did?"

He was standing quite close to her now, smiling down upon her. Her face flushed at the question. She was thinking of Geysbert. He saw the flush, and the momentary hesitation, and his smile died away. *Were* they a set of savages, that they had given this girl such cause to think ill of them? She had dropped her eyes to hide her confusion. Now she lifted them again.

"I *was* afraid, until — you were good to me," she said.

"And Ryseck? Did she keep her hands to their legitimate tasks?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. And she was kind, I think. But I cannot understand a word she says, and I am afraid of making her angry again. She was terribly fierce."

"Yes. Ryseck has a tongue. I'm not sure, on the whole, that it is not a Dutch possession. But you will know us better soon, and I trust you will find that, like the skulls here, we are not as dangerous as we seem."

"Did you put them here on purpose for the birds?" asked Aveline, glad to give the conversation a less personal turn.

"I am afraid we must not take credit for it at all,"

was the reply. "It is a fancy the negroes have. The head of every animal that is butchered is sacred to the birds, and little by little the slaves have ornamented the fences in the way they most fully approve of. Truly it must look startling to a stranger. You have seen how they accommodate their tenants nearer home?"

"No. Oh, you do not mean that all those odd-looking hats nailed to the boards are bird-houses too?"

"Surely they are. Our negroes are not pretty to look at, but there is something to be said for them. They love the birds, and are fond of everything that has life."

There was a moment's silence. In it Helmer remembered that his mother was awaiting an interview with her maid.

"Last night I was unable to take you to the house," he said. "Now you need no longer depend on Ryseck's tender mercies. My mother has returned, and will be very glad to see you."

She gave him one quick look, and the light died from her face.

"I am ready," she said. "Perhaps — I was wrong to come here."

"Nay, now you are returning to your evil opinion of us," he said deprecatingly. "My mother herself must reassure you."

He led her back, not by the road, but across a corner of the field, and by a footpath over the edge of the wooded hill in the rear of the house. Yielding to an instinct of courtesy, he refrained from ascending the broad steps at the back of the building, by which he would have ushered Aveline into the house by a back door.

"We have a good view of the river from the front stoop," he said, and passed round to the wide piazza,

stopping a moment to give Aveline time to combat the shrinking fear that almost overpowered her.

The door opened into a broad hall, which ran from front to back of the house, and at the first glance Aveline became aware that the room was tenanted. A little, elderly lady, with eyes dark and piercing, was sitting in a high-backed chair. Her hands, small and shapely, held a piece of knitting, and though she looked sharply towards the door, her fingers did not cease their quick movement.

"Mother, I have brought you a stranger, who, if I mistake not, is in need of your comfort, as you are in need of her help. She has formed but a poor opinion of us in her short experience in our midst."

Helmer advanced towards his mother as he spoke, and Aveline courtesied low.

"Is this — the maid of whom your brother spoke?"

The little lady was on her feet, steadily surveying this specimen of English youth and birth so suddenly introduced into her presence.

"This is the maiden," said Helmer quietly.

There was a long silence. Aveline ventured at length to raise her eyes. The lady was still regarding her with unflinching gaze, and as she met the clear, sharp eyes, a wave of colour spread over the girl's face.

"And what are you doing here, my lass, in the character of a bond-servant?" asked the lady, in a voice clear and penetrating, the sort of voice that commands an answer.

The flush on Aveline's face deepened.

"I am trying honestly to discharge a debt that came to my brother and myself by reason of unforeseen circumstances," she said, in a low, firm tone.

"And what do you suppose you can do for me?" asked the lady.

"Madam, that is for you to say," replied Aveline. "I

will try to do all that you desire. In the" — Great House, she would have said, but she changed the expression quickly — "house of my aunt, I have had some experience in the management of the maids, and I am not unskilled in housekeeping duties."

Madam Feljer, as the tenants styled her, made no answer, unless the sweep of her eyes over the face and figure of the speaker might be accounted an answer.

After her last words Aveline stood still, with that perfect stillness which comes of having muscles and limbs under the control of a steady, trained will. She was on inspection, and she awaited the verdict. It did not come, for the door at the other end of the great, roomy hall opened, and a fine, portly Dutch gentleman, with large, kind, blue eyes, stood in the opening. For a minute he too stood silent; then he entered.

"Whom have we here?" he asked, and though he spoke in Dutch, Aveline felt the friendliness of the tone.

The answer came from Helmer. Then the master of the house advanced.

"You are welcome, my dear," he said, in measured tones, as if the English words came painfully. "Pretty faces are not so plentiful in this land that we cannot well find room for another."

He came towards her, and held out his hand. Aveline placed hers in it. She felt the fatherly kindness in his tones.

"This is my new maid," said madam, in Dutch.

"Maid or mistress, I care not a straw," was the answer. "She is a maid worth having, that I'll swear."

"Little you know about it, beyond the fact that the lass has a pretty face," was the contemptuous answer. But madam turned to Aveline and said: "Since I am to take you into my service, I must needs know your name."

"It is Aveline Nevard," was the reply.

"Truly it sounds not like a name that belongs to the people," said the lady.

"At home all know it as an ancient name," replied Aveline quietly.

"And your branch of the family? Is it gentle or simple?"

"My father was the younger son, my uncle inherited the title," said Aveline.

"Title? Come you of titled people?"

Aveline simply inclined her head.

"There must be something wrong here," said the lady.

"Some sin is at the bottom of such an incongruity."

Aveline drew herself up proudly.

"Madam," she said, "if you are dissatisfied with the arrangement, I doubt not that in a few days my brother will appear, and then it would be a kindness — how great you cannot know — to cancel the agreement. My brother would gladly pay anything extra you may desire, if he might see me free again."

"Tut, tut! Not so fast. I'm not sure I am tired of my bargain yet," was the reply. "A maid's a maid, and if you can be useful, I'm enough in want of one to keep you to your bargain."

"And kind enough to give her a welcome."

"Welcome — yes, if she wants it."

Madam held out her hand.

"Come, young maid, let us be friends till we find some good reason for being foes," she said. "Come with me and see what sort of a house you have to overlook. There, don't look so scared. I'm not going to eat you. I don't know but that we can find you a decent room."

She led the way, and Aveline followed. As she passed through one of the doors the girl turned, and by a little sweeping inclination of the head acknowledged the kindness of both father and son.

CHAPTER XVII

THE sun was pouring slanting rays of heat into an already overheated atmosphere. He had been relentless all day, and now, when the end of his fierce reign approached, and he slowly yielded ground before the night, he seemed to take a savage pleasure in striking with his fiery beams the leaves hanging motionless on the trees, and the limp, hopeless herbage that appeared fairly to gasp in the baked air. Even the broad bosom of the Hudson was hot and lifeless, until, from out the shadow of overhanging trees, shot a canoe, which made a ripple on the water, and brought a suggestion of coolness.

Of all the objects upon which the sun just then tried his power, the taller occupant of the canoe was apparently the least affected by the heat. Big drops dripped from the brow of his companion, whose glistening black face showed signs of distress, but the long arm of the other moved easily. He was a man of middle age, tall and browned, and the lips that stirred to give a word of direction to the negro settled again into firm lines. There was no other boat on the river, nor sign of life along its banks, but overhead a hawk hovered for a minute, and then sailed away towards the dark line of mountain just here in full view. The canoe made rapid headway, and the black outline of forest along the western shore gave place to cleared land and fields brown with stubble, till, upon the brow of a hill, a house was seen, keeping guard over its own bit of civilized world.

"A goodly cage, but none the less a prison," said the stranger, looking long at the dwelling. "Mischief take the lad! If I'd had any notion of what was coming, I'd

have left him in his first plight. Far enough from here he'd have been then, and the maid —"

He broke off with a word of command, and the canoe shot in towards the bank. Before it touched land the stranger sprang ashore, stood for a minute reconnoitring, then gave a few clear, rapid directions to the negro, and strode off into a wagon-track that led towards the house. Midway between the river and dwelling he met a young man.

"Good-day to you, sir," he said in Dutch. "Is not yonder the Feljer manor house?"

"It is," replied the young man coldly. "What may be your business there?"

"If so be that I am speaking to one of the family, it may possibly happen that I have none," was the answer, "since in that case you can tell me whether there be here a young English maiden, by name Aveline Nevard."

"And what if there should be?" said Geysbert, eyeing him suspiciously.

"In that case I must even go on to the house, for my business is both with the maid and her mistress," was the answer.

"What do you want with either one or the other?" asked Geysbert. "I know of none who has claim on the maiden except her brother, and the eyes of a blind man would suffice to tell him that you stand not in that relationship."

"Truly you are not far wrong. I lay no claim to be the brother of any fair maiden," said the other, with a laugh, "yet it would be instructive to learn on what foundation you build your superstructure of opinion."

"Your question shows either a complete want of acquaintance with the maiden for whom you inquire, or else an overweening conceit," said Geysbert shortly.

The face of the other grew grave.

"You are right," he said. "I am nothing but plain

Roger Bennet, a trader with the Indians, and the maiden is of gentle birth. I am relieved that you have estimated her at her true value, and that her position is already known to you. The fact should make my mission the easier."

"Your mission? What is it?"

"To take her from a false position, and restore her to her brother's care," said Roger.

He spoke quietly, but his eyes were scanning Geysbert's face.

"You come a full two weeks too late," replied Geysbert angrily. "The maid is bought and paid for. If her brother needed her, he should have come to her rescue sooner."

"He lies at Albany with a broken leg, and lay thus, a stranger among us, with none to do his bidding, until I returned from a journey among the Indians," said Roger. "I come empowered to buy back the maiden, and compensate you for all expense to which you have been put."

"A likely thing," exclaimed Geysbert savagely, "that in a land where maids are scarce my mother should give up the services of one whom she has partially trained! It was his own lookout if her brother broke his leg. At least he should know better than to expect to put the consequences on strangers."

Roger's eyes were bent on the speaker. He made no direct answer to the words.

"The lady, your mother? Where shall I find her?" he asked.

"At the house. But I warn you you will have your labour for your pains," replied Geysbert.

"I will take the risk," said Roger, and walked on.

Madam Feljer stood in the broad hall in which she always received strangers. Her sharp eyes found their match in the clear, steady gaze of the tall visitor.

"Yes, if you choose to put it so, I am selfish," she said, "but not more selfish than a lad who could save himself at a maid's expense. For all I know, the lass is as well off with a selfish old woman as she would be with a selfish young man, and I venture to say she is safer in my protection than in his."

"And the girl herself?" said Roger. "Is it no pain to you to inflict suffering?"

"The lass is a little simpleton, and the simple are ever bound to suffer," replied the lady. "Had she known what was good for her, she would have stayed in her English home. I warrant you she'll suffer less with a steady hand over her, than she would were she at that lad's beck and call."

"I can urge no argument save that of humanity," said Roger, "and if that will not suffice —"

"As it will not," interrupted the lady, "since humanity is many-sided, and turns to me a face hidden, perchance, from you. I give you this comfort, however, to carry back to the lad, — who, to my mind, deserves naught but what he has got, — the maid shall be my charge as well as my servant, and if she will it, by reasonable submission to my wishes, the bondage shall be but in name."

Roger was silent for a minute, and the lady did not speak again.

"Madam, I thank you," he said at length. "The concession is not that which I sought, yet in your hands I think it will mean much. I ask but one other. Should you desire to rid yourself of the charge, will you give to the friends of the maiden the right to buy her back before you offer her services to any other? This phase of humanity should, I think, present but one face to any beholder."

"You are right. It is your due. And how, in the event of which you speak, shall I communicate with

you, or with that young fool, — your partner, I think you said?"

"Roger Bennet, Indian trader of Albany, is all the address that is needed to find me," was the answer, "and right glad I shall be if humanity should turn face, and you should quickly send me the message I desire. The money will not be wanting. And now, for her brother's sake and her own, I would see the maid."

The sun had sent out his last dart, and gone in unrelenting majesty down behind the mountains. There was a faint breathing of coolness, enough to make the parched plants lift their heads. The breath of the wind, however, was not responsible for the low sobbing sound that might have been heard in the wood beyond the manor house. The rustling among the leaves was caused by the swish of a girl's dress, and a glance at the eyes swimming with tears would have accounted for the rest. It was very still out there. That was why Aveline had come.

Roger Bennet had gone more than an hour ago, and with him had gone a certain undefined hope that had lurked in Aveline's heart. It had never seemed possible that it could be so, and yet she had sometimes dared to think that when Fulke came her freedom might somehow be obtained. Now she knew that the bondage was inevitable. There was not even the comfort of seeing her brother. Fulke was ill, and she could not go to him.

She had drawn from Roger Bennet the whole story. She knew that the young man was not recovering as he should have been. A man of his professional knowledge ought to have known that perfect quiet of mind and body was essential to a speedy healing. But quiet had been the last condition possible for Fulke. He fumed and chafed, and inwardly raged, until he rendered his host as desperate as himself. All this Roger told Aveline,

but he did not tell her of the wild look in her brother's eyes when he — Roger Bennet — came to his side, long after the time when he had been expected to return. And he did not tell her how the young man's words — a trifle incoherent sometimes — had roused Roger to action.

"Find her for me, Bennet, and bring her back with you, and you may charge anything you like for your pains," Fulke had said.

The ordinary mode of travel was too slow to meet the need, as Roger Bennet saw it. He knew, better than Fulke could do, the possibilities wrapped up in that word "bondage," and, because he understood, he had recourse to that which afforded the utmost speed of the day — a canoe journey down the Hudson. He travelled swiftly, but he arrived too late.

At that moment his canoe was making rapid progress up the river. Down in the wood Aveline was thinking of her brother, and of the hopes that were now all wrecked. Under the circumstances, the tears were not to be wondered at. She seated herself on the level stump of a tree, and let herself look at fate from the dark side. It was the sound of a step behind that caused her to rise hastily, and walk towards the open land, keeping her head persistently turned from the point whence the sound came.

"Surely the curse of having made ourselves a hunting people is upon us," said Helmer's voice, "for the innocent flee at our approach. Yet we are not always in a ravaging mood."

Intentionally he spoke lightly, but his heart was heavy for this girl. Helmer was to-day in a minority in his own home. In truth, he constituted the minority, since every other member of the family was on the other side. He had declared for yielding to Roger Bennet's request. Possibly the fact that the trader had already

pushed his canoe into the stream when Helmer gave his opinion, made it the easier to give.

Geysbert was unequivocally on the side of retaining Aveline's services, or was it Aveline's person? The young Dutchman had recovered his temper, and to a certain extent his position with his mother's maid. He could be very agreeable when he chose, and just now he did choose. There were so many things in colonial life of which Aveline was ignorant, and it was only a charity to enlighten her. It was Helmer, though, who had undertaken to make that first terror, the Dutch language, a familiar thing to her. He was a good teacher, or Aveline was an apt scholar, for already she was beginning to find something more than chaotic sound in good Ryseck's strong words, and in the babble of talk among the negroes on the place.

Aveline's pace slackened when Helmer spoke, but she did not turn her head. The tears were unmanageable, and two that had but lately overflowed were still glistening on her cheeks. They were the first objects Helmer saw when he reached her side. Possibly they accounted for the softening of his voice.

"Can you not forgive us for being selfish?" he said. "We plead guilty of the sin. But there *are* extenuating circumstances, though you cannot be expected to appreciate them. You would have to make fresh acquaintance with yourself before you could understand the temptation of holding on to that which even you must admit is no common possession."

It *was* a smile that played about her lips, though they quivered a little still.

"I wish you would let me teach you the Dutch verb 'to forgive,'" said Helmer. "It is not nearly as harsh as some of our words, and on your lips it would even rival your own English language."

The smile had conquered now, as Helmer intended it should.

"It is gloomy here in the wood," he said, — and there was no selfishness in the words, for to him the wood was anything but gloomy at that moment, — "shall we walk where the breeze has freer play? Yonder is Tyte, and for the last two minutes he has been screaming my name with all the strength of a fine pair of lungs."

"He seems to regard you as his especial property," said Aveline, looking towards the spot where a small negro boy was holding up a big fish, and still loudly clamouring for "Mars'r Helmer."

"Most certainly he does. Some years ago, when he was a very small boy indeed, he was solemnly made *my* especial property, and Tyte is quite sure that the arrangement is mutual. No sooner did he become my possession, than I was expected, according to negro tradition, to present my small servant with a pair of shoes and some money, and from henceforth I must take him under my wing. In return he sings my praises, and runs at my heels like a dog, and a noisy dog he is."

"Well, Tyte, what is it?" asked the young man, as he neared the boy and the group of negroes about him.

"Jest dis," said Tyte, in his best English, the result of Helmer's teaching.

"Dis" was a member of the fish tribe, a fine specimen of a drum.

"Who caught him?" asked Helmer.

"Me and Rufe."

"Me first, of course," laughed Helmer, giving the boy's saucy cheek a light cuff. Then he turned to Aveline. "Your countrymen have the laugh on us in respect to this and two other fishes," he said. "We call the drum 'dertienen' — the thirteenth. Tradition says that our first representatives in this land, knowing but ten kinds of fish, were excited when in spring they caught

the shad, a species before unknown to them. In their eagerness they named it 'elft' — eleventh. But soon came the bass, and as they flocked to see it they cried 'twalft,' or twelfth. Our friend the drum came last, and he got the name of 'dertienen.'"

Aveline laughed, and the small Tyte grinned and showed his white teeth. Then madam's voice sounded from the house, and Aveline turned away, but the dark lines had gone from beneath her eyes, and her step was lighter.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHAT? Tears in my merry maid's eyes? Who has been offending my girl? I'll teach those youngsters their place, and let them know who's master here. Which of them is it, Geysbert or Helmer?"

The owner of the manor house walked briskly over to the fireplace, near which Aveline was standing. The light of the dancing flame shone on her face, and showed suspicious tears. The old man shook his head.

"I haven't seen a tear on those pretty cheeks for many a day now," he said, "and somebody's going to answer for these, I tell them."

Aveline smiled, and stretched out her hand. Pieter Feljer took it, and held it in a firm grasp.

"Which was it?" he asked, and there was a twinkle in his eye.

"I was foolish," said Aveline. "I allowed myself to think of home and — and Joan. It was in April last year that she was married."

"And that packet you had from her awhile ago has made you homesick, eh? The anniversary of her wedding, and so on. Poor little maid!"

From the first Pieter Feljer had taken Aveline into his heart. He had not stopped to ask questions. That had been left for his wife. He had surrendered to the girl from the moment when he stood filling up the doorway of the hall, and taking stock of the new maid.

"Best thing Geysbert ever did in his life, or is likely to do," he had said many a time since. "I didn't think the lad had sense enough to bring home a lass like that."

Madam Feljer had never contradicted his assertion. When she promised Roger Bennet that she would take Aveline under her care, she did not speak without consideration. For fourteen days she had studied the girl, watching her with sharp eyes. By the time Roger arrived she had come to a decision. She wanted this girl, and she meant to keep her. A young maid was what the manor house most needed, and madam had no daughter. Aveline must stay, but there was no reason why the captive bird should not be taught to sing. The manor house was not an old English mansion, but, in madam's estimation, it was no whit behind any one of them. And if a girl wanted better company than Pieter Feljer's two lads, madam had little respect for her taste. The girl could be happy here if she chose, and in any case there were duties enough to keep her from moping.

There certainly was no lack of employment in such an establishment as Madam Feljer presided over, and the constant occupation was welcome to Aveline. It helped to bridge over the gulf between the old life and the new.

Madam had won her point. The bird had learned to sing. Perhaps the knowledge, which came before the winter, that she could not in any case have been Fulke's housekeeper, since his life would at present be too adventurous to allow of such a luxury, helped to reconcile her to the manor house; perhaps, as the days went on, she found the manor house itself not unattractive. Most surely it was the fault of neither Geysbert nor Helmer if she lacked amusement. There was a rivalry — not always friendly — between the two representatives of the house of Feljer. Geysbert was inclined to stand on his dignity as the elder, and assert his rights.

Pieter Feljer's eyes twinkled many a time as he noticed a certain coldness between the brothers, a stiffness of manner that had not always been there.

"One plum for two mouths is an unsatisfactory morsel," he would say.

Pieter Feljer was scarcely so old that he had forgotten certain emotions of his younger days.

His eyes were not twinkling now. They were tender with sympathy.

"Pity it is we cannot bring the good Joan over to look after her lass," he said. "But we can get up a wedding of our own, perchance as gay a one as Joan herself could boast of, and make this April a rival to the last."

Aveline's answering glance was a little doubtful. She was not quite sure how his words were to be taken.

"What? Has not madam told you? Verily she is chary of her good news, or she would have let you know that Fytje Roseboom and Jurian Opdyke are soon to be made happy, and madam is to give a chaise-party in honour of the young people. That will surely be new to you, my dear, something to bring back the smiles to this fair face."

He pinched her cheek as he spoke. It was not necessary now that his words should be in English. Helmer's teaching had proved very successful, and the Dutch tongue was to Aveline no longer a source of mystification. It was in that language she answered now. Pieter liked to hear it from her. He smiled as he looked back from the door, and saw her standing by the fire, a bit of brightness amidst the dark browns and blues of the big room. But when he was gone her face grew grave again. There were times when the old memories overpowered present associations, and made the girl long for Joan's motherly arms, and Sir Julian's protecting care. She had long ago ceased to be afraid. Looking back, she knew that her fears had begun to vanish from the moment when the dog Kip brought Helmer to her rescue, but the homesickness was not so easily cured.

From Joan Aveline's thoughts went to Fulke. Madam

Feljer had stopped saying unpleasant things about the young man since the day when she had an opportunity to say a few unpleasant things to him. Fulke had not been exactly polite on that occasion. He was too much in earnest to pick his words. They came, hot and uncompromising — an appeal that was almost a demand. He did not escape the natural consequences of his direct speaking. Madam took occasion to express a few opinions, and do a little plain talking on her own account. For the first time in his life, perhaps, the young man listened to straightforward, unflattering comments on himself without attempting excuse. Neither in word nor thought did he try to shift the blame. Now that the deed was irrevocable, he felt it past extenuation.

"You are right, madam," he said. "My sister is guilty of displaying more affection than discretion in trusting herself in my hands. She seems to be generally unfortunate in finding protectors who have their own purposes to serve."

"Speak for yourself, young man," was the answer. "Right well the accusation fits you, I doubt not, but till you have proved yourself better fitted for the charge, it is at least a question whether there be not as much wisdom as selfishness in keeping under my care a lass so little able to stand out against a reckless lad's demands. Go you to work, and show yourself a man fit to be trusted, and leave the girl where she has the safeguard of an old woman's guidance — selfish guidance, if you please, but little likely to land her where your foolhardy action brought her."

Fulke was at that moment on the broad seas, endeavouring to put that advice into action. He was on his way home in a vessel owned by Roger Bennet, returning from a business trip to the West India islands, where he had exchanged his cargo of flour and provisions for rum and molasses.

Aveline was wishing him a safe, but not altogether a speedy voyage. For reasons of her own she hoped that the bark might be a few days yet before she reached her port. For Aveline herself was expecting soon to be in the port of New York, and the city would lose its chief attraction if she should not meet her brother there. The coming wedding was almost forgotten, until madam set her to making sugar-plums for the occasion.

"We will give Jurian and Fytje a fine Dutch chaise-party," she said, "and the tenants and the slaves shall not be robbed of their largess."

"What is a chaise-party?" asked Aveline, and madam laughed, and told her to wait until it came, and she would know.

The morning of the chaise-party proved so bright and clear, with such a warmth of spring in the air, that Aveline felt any form of out-door life to be acceptable. The prospective bride and groom, the latter the son of a neighbouring land-owner, came early to the manor house, for a chaise-party was one of the most favoured of the festivities of that gay fortnight which pertained to the wedding pleasures.

When Aveline saw the little chaises, with their high wheels, and narrow seats each to be furnished with a maiden and a lad, she began to understand the meaning of a chaise-party. There had been a little covert rillery at the expense of the young men of the manor house that morning. Pieter Feljer's eyes twinkled again, and once or twice madam's flashed. But when she paired off her guests, madam bestowed on Helmer a blooming Dutch maiden, with large quiet eyes and a perfect complexion, and packed Aveline into a chaise grand with carving and gilding, painted with such wonderful scenes that it could be nothing less than an heirloom, and installed Geysbert on her left side as driver. The chaise was the last in the row of eight which drew

up along the broad road by the manor house door, while eight exultant swains, seated on the left sides of eight expectant maids, passed their right arms about the ladies' waists, as in duty bound to do on such an occasion. It scarcely needed a touch of the whips to bring the horses to an understanding of their duty. The foremost chaise shot ahead, away dashed the whole line in pursuit, and the chaise-party was in full progress.

To shower down sugar-plums on the heads of the open-mouthed negroes, who rushed out in a body to see the brave sight, was one of the joys of the occasion. The girls laughed, and the youths shouted, and as each house was reached, the tenants turned out to enjoy the fun. Again the sugar-plums came into requisition, and Aveline understood why madam had insisted on a liberal supply.

There was a bright flush on the girl's cheeks, brought there by the pressure of Geysbert's arm. Two couples ahead she could see Helmer bending his head to speak to his companion. His sleeve lightly touched the maiden's dress, so lightly that, could Aveline have seen, there was a pout on her lips. Not so was Geysbert's arm manipulated. He had no intention of allowing his companion to forget its existence, and the heightened colour on her cheeks was not ill-pleasing to him. He was gay, so gay that Aveline was forced to fall in with his mood, and laugh with the rest. The day was bright, and the motion rapid, and there was contagion in the merriment all along the line.

The road, a grass-grown wagon-track, just beginning to show signs of green, was soft and springy, and if deep ruts had occasionally to be avoided, they only added spice to the adventure. A dash through a piece of woodland brought them out to cleared fields beyond. Here the track curved sharply, and a little display of skill on the part of the drivers was in place. A small

stream crossed the road at the curve, and over it were laid a few rough planks, a rude substitute for a bridge. As the primitive bridge was approached, a tremor passed through seven maidens' frames. The eighth was innocently watching the rest as they swept round that curve. She saw the first vehicle strike the boards, a cavalier's head go down, the tightening of an encircling arm, and then a motion to which there belonged a distinct and peculiar sound, just now drowned by the thud of hoofs and the laughter of the company. It was over in a moment, and the next chaise was upon the bridge. One by one the little gigs touched the boards, and one by one the drivers took the reward of their labours. It is only fair to admit that there was no stealing about it. A free gift may ever honourably be taken.

As the number of chaises between herself and the bridge lessened until it was reduced to one, Aveline could use her ears as well as her eyes. When the head went down, and maid and escort approached more closely to each other, she could hear the sound which before had only affected her through the imagination. Now it became audible to a close listener. It was friendship grown resonant. She began to understand that there were revelations connected with a chaise-party.

She was so thoroughly absorbed in watching, that her observation of others carried her thought away from herself. She was close enough to see the details of the performance, and an amused smile was parting her lips, when the wheels of her own chaise touched the planks, and suddenly her companion leant forward, bent low, and quickly, and without warning, touched his lips to hers, then bending his head yet more, let his eyes laugh into her own.

"How dare you?"

There was danger in the flash of the eyes that answered his.

"Nay, nay, don't look so fierce," he said. "It is but my prerogative as escort and driver."

"Then I will walk. The price is too high for the privilege," said Aveline hotly.

In spite of his encircling arm she struggled to her feet.

"Stop the chaise," she said imperiously. "I will not trouble you to drive further."

"You will not?"

He snatched his whip from its resting-place, and the chaise rolled madly onward.

"There, how will that do?" he said. "You have yet to learn that the pleasures of a chaise-party are not of the quietest character. Come now, be generous, and treat me as well as Lentje is treating Helmer there."

Instinctively Aveline looked ahead. Helmer's partner had nestled closer to her escort. She was beginning to enjoy the drive. The sight did nothing toward lessening the close pressure of Aveline's lips.

"Since you will not stop," she said coldly, "I must even resign myself to the inevitable. I think this chaise would be less wearisome, however, if you could find it convenient only to occupy one side."

He drew his arm away angrily.

"Thank you. That is better."

"Better, is it? I'm glad you find it so."

"I thank you. I do."

He relapsed into sullen silence, during which a second bridge came in sight, and a little suppressed giggling sounded from ahead. This time Aveline did not smile. As she watched the repetition of the performance that had before struck her as amusing, her lip curled. She simply found it ridiculous.

"See there!" said Geysbert. "There are maidens less absurdly particular than yourself."

"Yes, I perceive that there are," responded Aveline. "They have a right to value their — kisses — as highly or as lightly as they please."

"Hm! Possibly they are worth as much as your own," he retorted.

"Then go and take them; that is, if any feel inclined to give you the privilege."

She turned full upon him. They were crossing the bridge. He gave his whip free play and they were over, the chaise rolling dangerously.

The drive was a failure — for Geysbert. Aveline sat very proud and still, as far away from him as she could get. Merry shouts of laughter came back to them from the leading chaises. There was no further word spoken. Aveline could hardly have told why she was so angry; Geysbert had simply followed the example of every other youth in the party. She had seen Helmer draw his companion towards him as he reached the bridge, though it must be confessed the sight had not pleased her. She had not smiled just at that moment. And yet — so illogical at times is the human mind — she had not felt that the dignity of his companion was wounded. She had been busy wondering whether or not he found the carrying out of the programme pleasant. But Geysbert! That was another matter. He should have known better. If he did not, he must take the consequences.

They were nearing their destination, a small, rough hut in the woods, where the wood-choppers found shelter. Here they were to have breakfast — rather a late one, as the sun was but an hour from the zenith — and then enjoy a ramble in the woods before the drive home. The alacrity with which Aveline sprang from the chaise was a new stab to Geysbert's pride.

There was much laughter and joking while the maidens prepared the meal, and Aveline's laugh mingled

with the rest. Yet, as she went outside to fetch some needed article, Helmer's voice said gently:

"You are not pleased with our Dutch merry-making."

"I neither deny nor plead guilty to the charge," she said. "You have not established it."

"In my mind it needs no establishing but that which a look into your eyes will give," he said. "We are a homely race, and our sports are perhaps rough."

"Yes. You drive furiously," she answered, and there was no suggestion of a smile, yet a slight quiver of Helmer's lips betrayed the thought that found no other expression.

"It is a sin," he said. "If you will trust yourself to me, I will prove on the return journey that even a Dutchman can be gentle."

There was certainly a relaxing of the muscles of her face. A conceited swain might easily have fancied that she was relieved.

After all, the day was not unpleasant. It was because the sun shone so brightly. It is well-nigh impossible to be altogether unhappy when a spring sun warms the air, and the world shows those tremors of life that come only once in a year. Helmer took possession of Aveline, and did for her the honours of the forest. At first the sound of voices was always near, but little by little the party separated, till Aveline found herself alone with Helmer. It was then she felt that the sun was shining so brightly, and that the warm earth was pleasant.

The outward journey had been arranged by the hostess; the return trip was brought into order by the manipulations of the pleasure-takers themselves. As a matter of course, it followed that in more than one case there was a change of partner. If Helmer had expected to be obliged to use a little skill in safely bestowing Aveline in the particular chaise of which he had charge, he found himself mistaken.

Geysbert had to all appearance more than recovered his spirits. He was paying devoted attention to a maiden who was ready to appreciate his efforts. She looked satisfied and triumphant, and though Geysbert's countenance could not be said to be a complete reflection of her own, it was at least full of gayety.

There was more hilarity on the second trip. The wine, that had not been spared at the meal, had loosened tongues and inspired wit. It is not even certain that everybody waited for a bridge at that time. Little screams, which were not of fear, and loud expressions of masculine satisfaction, were the order of the day.

Helmer had intentionally started last in line.

"It is pleasanter to watch than to be watched," he said, and Aveline agreed with him.

He kept his word as to driving soberly. The line of rattling chaises was always well ahead, though Helmer drove fast. He did not find it necessary to keep strictly to Dutch etiquette on that homeward journey. Once his hand touched Aveline's as he asked whether she felt cold, — a soft, spring breeze having arisen, — and once he found it necessary to assist her to a more comfortable position on the narrow seat. The hand he took in his was not cold. It was warm and soft — a tempting little hand. But Helmer resisted temptation.

"Well, what do you think of a chaise-party?" asked Pieter Feljer, as he came out to welcome them back, and held out his hand to help Aveline to the ground.

"That is a stolen privilege," cried Helmer, when she put her hand into the old man's.

Aveline laughed.

"It is pleasant — and unpleasant," she added truthfully.

"Well done," said the owner of the manor house.

"You have learned something."

CHAPTER XIX

"H I! Yah! Toot! Toot!"

The small Tyte waved the empty drinking-horn with a shaking hand. He had removed the stopper from the small end of it, for the purpose of blowing the shrill blast which was a sign of triumph, telling that the drinker had emptied the horn and was yet sober enough to apply his lips to the other end. Tyte was unsteady about the legs, and so generally unstable in his movements that the three young men who lay stretched on the grass set up a shout of raillery. The negro boy interpreted the shout as a compliment, and attempted a caper in response. His subsequent efforts to preserve his balance called forth peals of laughter, which reached a climax when the boy fell heavily, rolling on the ground in unsuccessful attempts to pick himself up again.

"Impudent little beggar that!" said one of the three. "But he's down for good this time."

"About hād his fill," replied Geysbert. "Myndert, you've lost your bet. He's dead drunk."

"Not he," said the third youth, who was the son of the most well-to-do tenant on the estate. "Let the blackamoor alone. He's good for two horns more yet. Here, you, Tyte! Up with you, and fill your horn."

He put out his foot and gave the boy a slight kick as he spoke. There was danger that he would sink into slumber.

Tyte made renewed attempts to rise. The contortions of his face, and the absolute refusal of his limbs to act in concert, provoked from the young men roars of laughter.

"You've lost your wager. He'll never drain that horn again, to say nothing of emptying it a second time," said Geysbert, eying the struggling boy critically.

"Won't he? That's all you know about it," retorted Myndert. "Don't be too sure. A bet's not lost till it's won, and you haven't won yet."

He got on his feet, reached down, took the negro boy by the clothing, and deposited him by the corner of the barn.

"Hold on to that, youngster, and take your drink like a man," he said, and he turned to refill the horn from a big pewter can by his side.

He had laid a wager that turned on the capacity of a negro boy to swallow liquor, and unless he succeeded in getting Tyte to drink two more horns of the fiery liquid, his wager was lost.

The shouts had drawn to the spot a small group of spectators, consisting of three grown slaves belonging to Myndert Hooghland's father, and some half-dozen negro children, all of whom took care to keep well beyond young Myndert's reach. His temper was known to be none of the mildest, and the slaves kept one eye on the fun and the other on the danger.

"Now, then! Catch hold, and let's hear you blow that horn again."

Myndert held out the brimming horn. A meaningless grin overspread Tyte's face. He stretched out his hand. That movement had a strange effect on the barn. Tyte felt it reel and stagger under his grasp.

"Dis — barn's — drunk!" he ejaculated, and loosed his hold, to fall a helpless heap at Myndert's feet.

The young man's foot spurned him savagely.

"Get up, you fool!" he said.

The negro group drew nearer, making a half circle around the actors in the scene. Geysbert raised him-

self on his elbow, and looked quizzically on. He had little fear of losing his wager.

"Here! Sit up if you can't stand, and take this. Now then, toss it off."

The young man held the horn towards the boy. He was determined not to be beaten. Pride, more than the desire of winning his bet, was at the bottom of his persistency. He had said he would win, and it would go hard with him to lose.

He propped up the boy in a sitting position. It was very evident that he was past standing. His head fell heavily forward on his breast, and his eyes closed and unclosed spasmodically. Tyte was struggling against the slumber that overpowered him. The young man jerked the victim's head back roughly.

"Wake up, you black rascal!" he shouted. "Now then, drink!"

"He's drunk as a pig," squeaked a childish voice from among the spectators.

That speech was a revelation to one of the on-lookers. She had come to a stand behind the encircling group, wondering and horrified, hesitating whether or not to interfere. Now she understood. Before even the excited negroes had noticed her, she pushed one of them aside, swept down on Myndert Hoogland as he tipped the horn to pour its contents down the boy's throat, and gave the vessel a blow sharp enough to send it with its contents to the ground.

"How dare you treat a child like that?" she cried indignantly.

Myndert looked up with an oath on his lips.

"Stand back there," commanded Aveline, her face ablaze with indignation. "Do you want to kill the child?"

"What is it to you whether I do or not? He's not your negro," responded Myndert angrily.

"Nor yours. But if he were, it would make the case no better."

"Makes it a little the worse that the black rascal's the property of Helmer Feljer, doesn't it?" asked Myndert with a leer. "You naturally feel a little more interested in his property than in that of — say Geysbert here — or any of the rest of us, eh?"

Aveline gave him a look of scorn, but she found it unnecessary to answer.

"Take that liquor away, and set one of your slaves to help the boy home," she said. "You have done the mischief, and the least you can do is to remedy it."

"Oh, yes, surely. Your commands are as welcome as they are peremptory. Would you like to wait and see them carried out, or will you leave that to me? I shall be mightily pleased to receive any number of them."

He had picked up the horn, and was refilling it as he spoke. With a quick sweep of his arm he pushed Aveline aside, and once more held the liquor to Tyte's lips. The negro boy, partially roused by Aveline's voice, was trying in a bewildered fashion to understand what was required of him.

"No, no, Tyte! Don't drink it," commanded Aveline, struggling to get past the outstretched arm.

Myndert tipped the horn. But the girl's words had cut their way into Tyte's stupefied brain. He set his teeth, and gave his head a weak jerk. It was enough to spill the liquor and to anger Myndert.

"Open your mouth, you fool!" he cried.

"No — Missy Av'line — say — no. Dis — boy — do — as Missy — Av'line — say."

It was an effort almost beyond the muddled brain and the uncertain tongue, but the words were said.

"What, you won't? Then take that to sober you!"

The young man gave the boy a brutal kick, and had lifted his foot again when he felt a hand at his collar,

pulling with a strength not to be despised. He turned and encircled Aveline with his arm, holding her from him.

"How now, little fury!" he said. "What next? Better go and tell Helmer. This is no place for ladies."

"It would be a good place for a man — if there were one," said Aveline, and she glanced towards Geysbert.

He seemed not to see that look. He was waiting until she appealed to him for protection. His pride was yet sore over yesterday's rebuff. The chaise-party was but a day old. Presently he might forget — but not to-day. When she wanted his help she could ask for it. She could have it readily enough then. But as long as she was too proud to ask, he was too proud to offer. Let her take the consequences of her actions. It would be wholesome for her.

He did not interfere when Myndert lifted Aveline from her feet, and with an angry "Get out of the way there, the whole lazy pack of you!" sent the negroes scurrying to right and left as he carried the girl beyond the group.

"There, go home to your mistress," he said brutally. "Truly, for a serving-maid, and in bondage at that, you are a bold wench, to interfere with men that are your masters."

Aveline's face turned very white. It was the first time she had met the taunt.

"Men, do you say? Verily, it has a strange sound when thus applied. Willingly would I cease from such association," she said, slowly and distinctly. "But I must see justice done to the boy."

"You must? Then I am bound to dispose of you first, and take my will on the black rascal later."

"No. You will take *that* first!"

The movement was so sudden and unexpected that Myndert was sprawling on the ground before he had

thought of danger, and Helmer's dog Kip was growling and sniffing over him, half disposed to take a turn in the fray by applying his teeth to the leg of the prostrate enemy.

"Come off, Kip," commanded Helmer sharply, and the dog slunk round to Aveline's heels.

The blow had been given so quickly and dexterously that Helmer had succeeded in disengaging Aveline from the young man's grasp at the very moment when he staggered to his fall. Now he kept his arm about her.

"I apologize for our race as a set of brutes," he said savagely, bending down to look into her face. "Yet they are not all such specimens as these."

His sweeping nod took in the three young men, including them all in the accusation.

"Are you hurt?" he asked anxiously.

"No — but Tyte —"

"I'll attend to Tyte later. Now, if you are not hurt, you — had better stand back."

The last words came quickly. Helmer sprang aside, putting Aveline by that act in a place of safety, just as Myndert, blind with rage, jumped to his feet. The blow, given with the strength of a young arm nerved with indignation, had for the moment stunned him. Now he rushed at Helmer with murder in his face.

The young man braced himself to meet the shock. It would not have been a minute before Myndert would have felt again the reactionary power of the solid earth, for Helmer was ready for the attack. But Geysbert had already risen to his feet. He had foreseen the result of that first blow, and he set himself to prevent a second by planting himself in Myndert's way. Not that he cared whether his companion received his deserts or not, but he was averse to seeing Helmer the victor, and that he would be the victor was a foregone conclusion. Any triumph for Helmer was gall to Geysbert at this

moment. Moreover, Aveline was looking on, her face white with excitement. She should not see Myndert beaten in the encounter, for in a measure he himself was involved in it. For the time he and Myndert were on the same side.

"Don't be a fool, Myndert," he said. "You've had your turn, and Helmer's had his. The boy's his negro, and you took the risk when you meddled with him. We've about had enough of this business. Better be moving, and leave the rest to do as they please."

Myndert hesitated. Wild as he was with passion, he knew that he was no match for Helmer. He glared at the young man for a moment, and then turned towards the house.

"I'll be even with you yet, Helmer Feljer," he said, and there was hatred enough in his tone to cause Aveline a sharp twinge of fear.

"All right. I'm ready any time," said Helmer scornfully. "Better stand up now, like a man, and take the thrashing you'll get if I have a chance at you. The thrashing you deserve is a bigger matter."

Then he turned to Aveline.

"I will see you safely out of this ruffianly neighbourhood, and then send one of the negroes to look after Tyte," he said.

She made no attempt to thank him. She grew shy and quiet the moment the others had disappeared. For a time neither spoke. Helmer was thinking of Myndert's taunt. Aveline had become so much one of the family that the very mention of any other relationship made him set his teeth together savagely. He was repenting of letting the young man off so easily.

"I should not have interfered," said Aveline suddenly, "but he was behaving like a brute to poor Tyte."

"He *is* a brute," interrupted Helmer. "He had no right to touch the boy. And as for daring so much as

to look at you — I wish Geysbert had let things alone. The thought of it makes my fingers itch to punish him as he deserves."

"No, no," said Aveline eagerly. "Let him alone. He is revengeful, and might take some unfair means of injuring you."

"I am not afraid," said Helmer quietly.

"But I am."

"For me?"

There was a ring in his voice not to be mistaken. He tried to look into her face, but did not succeed very well. His anger had suddenly vanished, dispersed before the warmth of this new emotion. Myndert's transgression dwindled. What did it matter who dared to sneer? If Aveline would only let him, he would soon show the world what was her position in the household.

They were nearing the house.

"I shall be safe enough now," said Aveline, "and some one ought to look after Tyte."

"I will see to it at once," he replied. "And — you will not allow any of Myndert Hooghland's insolence to annoy you?"

"That is a promise which I can only give conditionally," she said. "You will not allow his insolence to provoke you into punishing him?"

"You are too merciful."

"No. I think I do not care for his side of the question at all. But I should be anxious if I thought —"

She looked up at him, and he did not ask her to finish the sentence.

Strange to say, Aveline's thoughts that night were not of Myndert Hooghland's insulting words, nor of the wrongs of the youthful Tyte, but of the look that met hers before Helmer turned away. The next day she started with Pieter and Madam Feljer for New York.

CHAPTER XX

"**T**HERE, my dear, look well at him. It is not every new governor who can boast of being own cousin to a queen."

Pieter Feljer's admonition was surely unnecessary. Not only Aveline, but all New York, was "looking well at him" — the new governor, Lord Cornbury. On this day in May, of the year 1702, the little city had turned out to do him honour, personally, by that particular form of loyalty which consists in patiently waiting for the privilege of "looking well" at its object, and officially, by entertaining him through its corporation at a grand banquet.

Not two months before, the province had exhibited its fellowship with the English land by mourning the death of William III., and his successor had yet to be officially proclaimed in this part of her dominions. Viscount Cornbury was the personal link which was to unite them to the new sovereign, being not only her representative, but also her kinsman.

Aveline's eyes were a little brighter than usual as she stood to see him pass. She was very happy to-day, with Fulke on one side of her, and good Pieter Feljer on the other. It was no wonder that the new governor's gaze rested approvingly on the group. So marked was the notice that Aveline blushed and courtesied low in reverence to the queen's representative, and madam remarked complacently:

"As handsome a gentleman as one could wish to see, and evidently a man of taste and sense."

It is possible that the taste might have been shown in

a yet more emphatic manner had not the six fine horses attached to the viscount's carriage drawn him past the party which had attracted his attention. The banquet was to come, and the homage of the city magnates, but while he listened to their speeches of loyalty, Lord Cornbury was thinking of a girl's blushing face, and trying to place it satisfactorily in relationship to its surroundings.

"Neither the boy nor the girl calls that fine old Dutchman father, I'll wager," he said, and the next moment rose to reply to the address of welcome.

The city was in gala attire. Aveline could have chosen no better time to make its acquaintance. It would have been impossible to feel anything but pleased with it, with its mixture of imposing buildings recently erected, and quaint old Dutch houses standing gable end to the street, adorned, as to the gables, with checks of red and yellow and black bricks. The shade-trees, which, a few years later, made a traveller remark that walking through the streets of New York was like walking through a garden, had just burst into leaf, and under them was to be seen a mixed people, who had brought some of the good from each land its individual members represented. Already New York had become a city of many races, though just now it was a city of but one idea, and that idea was to give a fitting welcome to the representative of Queen Anne.

It was not solely for this purpose that Pieter and Madam Feljer were here. "We may as well join business with pleasure," Pieter had said, "and since we must go to the city, time our visit so that we may witness the governor's arrival."

To Pieter and his wife the great event of the journey was the buying of a large tract of land just outside the city; to Aveline it was the coming of Fulke. He arrived on the very day on which they set foot in New

York, and from that moment the attraction of New York for Aveline was secure.

The last time she saw those quaint Dutch streets she had been sure that Sir Julian and Joan were right, and that the venturing to America was a mistake. To-day she was willing to reserve her judgment. For Fulke was prospering, and was looking forward with eager anticipation to the trading that would come in the summer months, when he would have his first dealings with the Indians. Already there was a change in him, a reflection of the sturdier life he was leading. He was not more self-reliant than before, but Aveline found him more reliable.

The happiness in her heart was mirrored in her face, and it was no wonder that Pieter Feljer beamed proudly on her when he saw the inquiring glances cast in her direction, or that madam looked well to the details of her toilet before she introduced her as — “A young English maid whom I have taken under my wing while her brother is engaged in trade. She is fast making me forget that I have no daughter.”

It was thus she introduced her in the house in which she and her husband were guests during their stay in New York, and it was thus she spoke of her on the day when Pieter and Madam Feljer had the honour to meet the governor in one of the more palatial dwellings of the city.

There was a little awe in Aveline's heart when she found herself one of the brilliant company gathered together in this colonial mansion to meet Lord Cornbury. She tried to remember all Lady Betty's instructions, and look well to her ways, that that good lady might have no cause to be ashamed of her could she see her to-day. The immense rooms, the heavy carved furniture, the wealth of plate, and the abundance of servants, were all imposing, and a trifle bewildering,

after her quiet life at the manor house, but if she feared a little, the fear only added grace to her manner.

Pieter Feljer found the new governor an affable and pleasant gentleman on that occasion. Later on, men called him haughty and arrogant, but if some tinge of pride appeared in his demeanour, it was not allowed to be too pronounced as he discussed with the old Dutch gentleman the affairs of the province as they presented themselves to a large land-owner. He did not disdain even to take an interest in Pieter Feljer's personal concerns. He asked of the extent of his possessions, and the status of his tenants, and informed himself of the character of the land in the mountain-bound district above Kingston at Esopus.

"And yonder maiden," he continued, "should be your daughter, for, if I mistake not, your eyes follow her with a glance that is not less than paternal."

"All in good time, your Excellency," said Pieter, the old twinkle in his eye.

"Ah, I see. There is a scion of the good old Dutch stock who has taste equal to that of his father."

"Nay, but there are two," said Pieter, with a chuckle.

"A dangerous combination," replied Lord Cornbury, and there was a little extra light in his own eye. "And the maid? She is not of Dutch birth?"

"No, she comes of a fine old English family. The youth, her brother, is to be thanked that she is not still in her own land."

Of the character of the English maiden Lord Cornbury seemed disposed to judge for himself, for he deigned to make the acquaintance of Madam Feljer, and that good lady found him no less affable than her husband had done. It was noticed that he talked longer with Aveline than with any other lady present. It was a distinction which caused a few of the stately dames of New York to look askance at the youthful

stranger, and confirmed Madame Feljer in her high opinion of Lord Cornbury's taste.

Aveline herself found her fears vanish when she was actually in conversation with the great man of the province — the cousin of Queen Anne herself. He knew how to make himself agreeable, and how to draw the shy smiles to his companion's lips. She found herself telling him of Sir Julian and Lady Betty, and even of Fulke's prospects, and her own joy thereat. But when he remarked: "Your good uncle stands little chance of welcoming back his niece and ward, if rumour speak the truth," the colour dyed her face, and the smile on her lips changed to a nervous quiver. The change did not escape the governor's eye.

"Nay, nay, fair maid. I swear that none shall cause you distress," he said kindly. "We will issue our mandate against any undue coercion of the will of the maidens of our domain. These young Dutchmen shall win the treasure in all fairness before they dare to seize it, and if either should take unfair advantage, I will myself acquaint him with the rights of English maidenhood, and with our pleasure that these rights should be respected."

The tremulousness had gone from Aveline's face. She had feared that his words had another meaning. The flush was not as quick to depart. It is not certain that Lord Cornbury judged it to detract from her charms. He was studying her face closely, and he seemed in no hurry to banish that ruddy glow, or his next words would surely have been left unsaid.

"Which of the two, think you, will be the first to come under the ban of our displeasure?" he asked, and his eyes smiled, though his lips were grave.

"Neither, your Excellency," said Aveline demurely.

"What? You would shield both?"

The smile broke about her lips again.

"No, your Lordship. It were safer to order myself so that neither shall transgress," she said.

"You will have need to order that face of yours that it may be less witching then," he replied, and laughed as she dropped him a courtesy, and let her eyelids veil her eyes from his gaze.

It was no wonder that in one family opinion was unanimous in favour of the new governor.

Once again, during the time which intervened between his reception by the city and the official proclamation of the successor of William III., did Aveline have the opportunity to see a little more of the new ruler than fell to the lot of the ordinary citizen. The meeting was a chance one, for she had set out to see, not the governor, but the fort. On this occasion she was under Fulke's protection, and was so much like the Aveline of old times that the young man drew more than one long breath of relief.

It was to the inner life of the fort that he was about to introduce his sister, having made the acquaintance of one of the garrison, who had promised to show him all there was to see. The old fort did not take long to inspect, and they were passing into one of the main passages when their guide exclaimed hastily:

"Stand aside! Here comes the governor."

"The governor!" said Fulke, with a derisive laugh. "Truly yon comer is stately enough for my Lord Cornbury himself, and might well be mistaken for him, were it not that the form of this majestic promenader is that of the weaker sex."

"Stand back there, and keep a still tongue in your head," was the sharp response, and the soldier thrust the two into the doorway, and took a becoming military attitude himself.

The imposing dame advanced with measured step and head held high. The face, haughty and handsome, was

lengthened in appearance by the tall "tower" or "com-mode" worn by ladies of the period, an elaborate structure of silk and lace, more than a foot in height, from each side of which hung broad ends, also of lace.

"Surely 'tis none other than the Princess Anne — I crave her pardon — Her Most Gracious Majesty, Queen Anne herself," muttered Fulke, as in the wearer of the richly wrought gown, gathered up over a flounced petticoat, he discerned the well-known features of the royal personage who had yet to be proclaimed queen in New York.

The apparition, for it was scarcely less, was level with the door, but instead of passing it, and going forward, the new-comer stopped, and looked for a moment in silence at the two.

"It *is* the governor," whispered Fulke, and at the same instant Aveline recognized the features of Lord Cornbury. Both becomingly acknowledged the presence of royalty's representative. The governor broke the silence.

"Ah, I have not forgotten this fair face. How goes the world with you, my dear?"

Aveline answered him timidly. This dual character confused her. As for Fulke, he hardly knew whether to regard the speaker as the governor — Lord Cornbury — or as the august lady he resembled.

"And this is your brother, I doubt not," said the governor, "the young man of whom you spoke. I trust he will prove an acquisition to the province, and a loyal subject of that most gracious lady, Her Majesty, Queen Anne."

Fulke bowed low, and the governor continued:

"You are welcome to the fort, and more especially on the present occasion. You have now the opportunity to behold, not simply the representative, but in some measure the impersonation, of my royal cousin,

that Most Gracious Sovereign, Queen Anne. In looking upon me it requires but a slight stretch of the imagination to conceive that you look upon the august features of the Queen of England. It is truly said of me that I bear a striking resemblance to my revered cousin, and I would quicken your loyalty, and the loyalty of the people of this province, by presenting your sovereign before your eyes in a manner as nearly suggestive of her actual presence as is compatible with the distance of this from the motherland."

He bowed graciously to the brother and sister, and passed on, to quicken the loyalty of other sojourners in the fort.

"Of a truth, this is a strange maggot," said Fulke, when the governor was well out of hearing.

"Hush, he is the governor. Surely it is a species of treason to speak other than respectfully of so kind a gentleman," said Aveline warningly.

"It is not as new to us as to you," remarked the soldier. "'Tis an odd sight, but he would be a bold man who would dare to smile when my Lord Cornbury was passing."

The eighteenth of June was a second great day in the city of New York. On that occasion travellers from all parts of the province poured into the town to witness the ceremonies attending the official proclamation of Queen Anne. The solemnity was attended with a great display of loyalty, and much state, such as the drawing out of all the forces, the appearance of that august body, Her Majesty's Council, and of the governor himself, attended by the mayor, the aldermen and common council, the clergy, and all the principal citizens. It was a time of rejoicing and festivity, but to Aveline it was not as gay as the day on which the governor was welcomed. Then Fulke was with her, but to-day only Pieter and Madam Feljer were her companions.

"It is a brave sight enough, but the manor house suits me better," madam said. "I doubt my eyes are getting over-old for much sight-seeing."

"To-morrow the governor starts for New Jersey," said Pieter, "and in a few days we will follow his example, and set out for home. The last arrangements about the land shall be made at once. Then Geysbert will have cause to be content. His portion will be broad enough to meet his expectations, and next year we will come back, and he shall build him a house to suit his taste. After that there will be nothing for him to do but find himself a mistress for his dwelling."

He looked a little sharply at Aveline as he spoke. Geysbert was his eldest son, and there was in the old man's heart a little leaning towards giving him an elder son's privilege, the pick of his father's possessions. It was Geysbert's own desire to have an estate in the neighbourhood of the city, and let the manor house fall to Helmer. He had always had an inclination towards trade, and he wanted to be near the business heart of the province. Perhaps the thought that he could there offer Aveline attractions not to be found in the quiet of the old manor house had something to do with his determination. Pieter would have liked to have been a little surer that the mistress Geysbert wanted for his home would consent to preside over it.

"Well, little sight-seer, have you had enough of the city?" he asked.

"Quite," replied Aveline firmly.

"And you are ready to go back?"

"Of course I am, with you and madam."

"Oh, the old folks are the attraction, eh?"

He gave her cheek a pinch, and then noted the colour that swept over it. It was not all due to the action of his fingers.

"Wait till next summer," he said. "Then we will see which answers best as escort, the old man or the young."

Madam Feljer said nothing, but she too was watching Aveline. Perhaps her conclusions did not differ materially from those of her husband. Whatever they were, they did not bring a frown to her brow. Pieter had a deep crease between his eyes just now, but madam's face was smooth and calm.

It was not many days later when Aveline accompanied Pieter on his final expedition to inspect the land, and complete the purchase of the same. The old man was in high spirits.

"There will be a Feljer to take part in city ceremonies soon," he said. "The governor wants able young men around him. There are offices to be filled, and duties to be done for the province. The Feljers have been too long buried among the mountains."

"Such a life will suit Geysbert well," said Aveline, willing to give the old man pleasure. "And the governor seems a kindly gentleman."

"And how would it suit you, my dear?" he asked, ignoring the last remark.

"Oh, I think I love the mountains too well to part from them," she said lightly. "You and madam have made the manor house home to me."

"You are a grateful little lass," he answered.

They were returning from their expedition, and nearing the outskirts of the city, having come to a thoroughfare known as Maiden Lane, or as the Dutch people called it, Maagde Paetje, the Virgin's Path. It was a very new neighbourhood, only laid out in recent years. That the path was well-trodden was due less to the fact that the population was stretching outwards towards the country, than to the presence of a little stream of spring water running through the valley. To this spring the laundresses of the city came for water, and their coming an-

swered the double purpose of treading a firm path to the spring, and of giving to the road its name.

For a minute Pieter drew rein, and sat looking towards the city. Further citywards a procession could be seen moving with slow, mournful step, its central objects the figures almost covered by a heavy pall.

"That is the second funeral I have seen to-day," said Pieter, and after that he talked no more of Geysbert or the future.

"Is it all right, and have you completed the purchase?" asked madam eagerly, as the two entered the house.

"Yes. It's our land now," answered Pieter, rubbing his hands jubilantly.

"That is well. Now I can rest content," she said.

But she did not rest content. There was a strange uneasiness about her. Though it was past the middle of June, she complained of cold, and Aveline lighted a fire of small wood on the hearth in her bedroom, and persuaded madam to draw her chair close to it.

"I am surely getting old for sight-seeing," she said. "I have never known it tire me thus before."

Her hostess came to sit with her, and recommended certain potions good for a chill, but when she was well out of madam's sight she shook her head.

"I should not be surprised if she were taken with the same ailment that has laid Lisbeth Govertsen low," she confided to her husband.

"I'm fairly tired — tired right into these old bones," madam said to Pieter in the morning. "Go you and see all that is to be seen, and hear all that's to hear. For me, my head will stand no more city noises. It aches as if those rattling wagons were being driven clear through it."

"You don't think there's anything really wrong?"

Pieter asked, as he met Aveline without the door. He looked at her appealingly.

"No, I hope not. Just a chill, in all probability," she replied, and she smiled at him reassuringly.

Pieter went out. When he returned he looked ten years older.

"How is she?" he asked quickly.

"Neither better nor worse, I think," said Aveline.

The old man dropped into a chair.

"I would give all I possess not to have come to New York," he said.

Aveline looked at him in alarm.

"The city is stricken. Fully a dozen are down, and she — I doubt it is the fever too."

"Nay, nay, Pieter Feljer. What is this for a beginning to a sickness?" said his hostess, coming in on him suddenly. "How is the good vrouw to pull through if you meet her with a face that long? If so be it is the fever, all the more need of determination to fight for her life. 'Twill take more than a long face to do that."

He was on his feet instantly. "You speak truth, Ragel Vanderhorn," he said. "I'm a selfish old man. Wyntie made but a bad bargain in me, I fear. Yet I have not been altogether inactive. I sought out a doctor as I returned, and left notice for him to follow. The good man had gone elsewhere."

"Pieter! Was that Pieter's voice?"

Madam's restlessness had increased instead of diminishing. She heard her husband below.

"Yes, Wyntie. I'm coming."

And he did come, with the speed of a young man. He drew breath heavily when he reached the top of the stairs. Aveline waited for a minute, to speak with Mrs. Vanderhorn.

"What is it?" she asked, in a frightened whisper.

"Fever, so they say. There has been more than one

death already. 'Tis a distemper the sailors bring from the islands of the West Indies. It was a sailor brought it this time from St. Thomas."

"Do you think madam has caught it?"

"Heaven only knows, child. It looks amazingly like it."

Before the day was over Aveline could have answered the question for herself. Madam lay tossing in fever and pain, and Pieter watched by her side like a faithful dog, ready to spring up at her slightest request. Two days later one of the negro servants in the house was smitten. With her the disease took but a short course. There was little care required. She succumbed at once, and a coffin was almost the only necessity. When the body had been carried out, Ragel Vanderhorn sought Pieter.

"You are welcome to stay here as long as you like," she said. "For me and my man, we are going to his sister's over on Long Island. There's no sense in more of us dying than are called upon. I'll leave you Nance to wait on you. If she should take the fever, you'll have to look out for yourselves."

The household was a very silent one when its mistress was gone. Black Nance went in a frightened way about her work in the kitchen, and Aveline and Pieter watched above. The doctor came and went with anxiety on his face. He had many patients now. The city, which a few days before had been jubilant, was in mourning. It was not simply that sickness was there, but that death, in the great majority of cases, followed close on the heels of sickness.

It was a dread visitor that had come to greet the new governor. He shrank from it, not altogether on his own account. Pieter Feljer met him after his return from New Jersey. The old man stopped. He must needs tell of his sorrow.

"How goes it with you in these times?" asked the governor, himself aroused from troubled thoughts.

"Sorely, your Excellency, sorely," said Pieter. "It was a sad day when I left the manor house. My wife is laid low."

The governor's brow contracted. The words touched a responsive chord.

"I extend to you my sympathy," he said. "I see your anxiety in your face. I myself am not without similar care. Lady Cornbury is not like your good lady. She knows nothing of the vigour of health. Were the breath of this accursed disease to touch her, she would succumb at once. I am even now on my way to make arrangements for removing her from the city."

"Whither will you go?" asked Pieter, for the moment losing the sense of his own sorrow in the troubles of the governor.

"To Jamaica, on Long Island. I have had an offer that speaks much for the loyalty of its originator, the pastor of the Presbyterian Church in that place. The worthy gentleman has behaved uncommonly well. He has offered to take his family from the parsonage, and leave the place — which I understand is a new structure, and therefore may well suit my purpose — at my disposal until such time as Lady Cornbury and my children can safely be brought back to the city. I am on my way to inspect the house. If it turn out satisfactory, I shall lose no time in removing my family thither, for it is near enough for the business of the province to be transacted there instead of here."

"Your Lordship will be acting wisely," said Pieter. "It was very thoughtful of the good man."

All the way home Pieter was busy with thoughts of the invalid wife of the governor.

"Poor lady," he said. "I trust the precaution may not be too late."

But when he came in sight of the house where madam lay, Lady Cornbury was forgotten, and the old man dropped into his place in the ranks, and helped to carry on the fight for life that was being waged there.

He rarely left his wife's side, except on some necessary errand. He would sit and watch her and Aveline with a dumb faithfulness that never overlooked a want, or neglected the smallest opportunity to be useful. Aveline did not know how many steps he saved her, nor realize how he planned to meet her every need, until she found ready to her hand just the article she wanted at the moment. His thoughtfulness took off her shoulders all the heavier tasks, and left her free for those more delicate ministrations which his clumsy fingers performed but awkwardly. His face grew very old and careworn, and there was a tired look in his eyes that would not have escaped Aveline's notice had she not been so much engrossed with madam.

The fight was a hard one, but the watchers were winning. Aveline was beginning to be sure of it now. She told Pieter so one day, and he laid his trembling hand on her arm.

"The Lord be thanked," he said. "I think you are right."

He tried to smile, but his lips quivered instead, and Aveline noticed that his face did not lighten.

"He is tired," she said, and turned to attend to madam.

CHAPTER XXI

PIETER FELJER had taken the fever. He knew it himself long before Aveline found it out. His bones ached, and his head seemed nothing but a centre of weariness and pain.

"I won't let her know yet," he said. "I must keep up to the last moment. The poor little lass has enough on her hands. Wyntie must not be neglected."

He did keep up, saying no word of his pain and weariness, going patiently back and forth between his own room and his wife's every half hour, as he had taken to doing for the last day or two, forcing into his voice a forlorn imitation of cheerfulness, and carefully noting everything that needed to be done before setting about the tasks that were never more scrupulously performed than now, though when they were completed he staggered away to throw himself heavily upon his bed, and with pathetic patience try once more to rest those weary bones.

"Geysbert, my boy, I doubt you'll never see your old father again," he said drearily, as for the twentieth time he dragged himself across the room, and buried his aching head in the depths of the pillow. "But the land's yours, my boy. I've seen to that."

"Why, what is it? You are not sick?"

He had forgotten to shut the door, and Aveline, crossing the upper hall, could see him where he lay. She had heard his words. Now she looked anxiously into his face.

"Nay, sir, but you have hidden it from me," she said, in a chiding tone. "You should have been cared for long ago. When did it first come on?"

"I don't know. I forget. It seems as though my bones had ached forever," he said, a weak attempt at a smile disturbing the heavy lines into which his face had fallen.

Tears filled Aveline's eyes. She had learned to love the old man, and the pitiful loneliness of his suffering sent a sharp pang to her heart. She had been so taken up with madam that she had forgotten him.

"You must not leave her," he said imperatively. "I can get along as I have done before. Did she want anything? I'll go and fetch it. I was only resting a bit."

He raised himself wearily as he spoke. She laid her hand on his.

"No, no. She is asleep. I came to tell you. She is sleeping quietly and naturally. I am sure she is better."

"God be praised," he said fervently, and two big tears rolled down his careworn cheeks. "Take care of her, child. Never mind me."

"I wish I had minded you sooner," said Aveline penitently. "I will not go another step until you have let me do for you all that the doctor ordered for her. You must go to bed at once."

"No, that I will not. She will want me. She must not know. It would put her right back again. Promise that you will not tell her."

He put out his hand and held her fast.

"Not as long as she will rest content. There is no danger at present. Now, while she is sleeping, you must let me care for you."

Until he was lying between the sheets, and Nance had been dispatched in haste for the doctor, there was no persuading her to go back to madam. When she did go, it was only to peep in and return.

"She is sleeping still," she said hopefully. "I am sure you may be at ease about her now."

"Yes, yes. It is good news. But I must not lie here," he expostulated. "She will miss me."

"I will tell her what is the truth, that you have run hither and thither until you have wearied yourself," said Aveline. "She will desire that you should rest. Then I will bring you her message, and when she knows it is obeyed she will be satisfied."

"You are a good maid," he said. "Go, child, and see to madam."

"Tired, is he?" asked madam, with a little of the old ring in her voice. "Surely it is not to be wondered at. And you might well be accounted tired too, to judge by your face. Go and tell him to rest, and do you lie down and sleep. I want nothing more now."

There was more life in her voice than had been there since the fever came. Aveline gladly took advantage of the permission to hasten to Pieter's side with her message. His face was flushed, and his breathing laboured.

"How is she?" he asked.

"Better, and she bids you rest."

"Tell her I will. Ah, Wyntie, lass, it's about the only thing I could have obeyed you in. These old legs have failed me. I can wait on you no longer."

He buried his face in the pillow, and Aveline heard two or three heavy sobs.

"I'd have given much to have had one more look at her," he said. "But I'm down for good. I tried it when you were gone. There's no strength left in me."

Then he uncovered his face.

"My lass," he said, "I wanted to hear you call me father before I went. You've been a daughter to Wynthie and me in our need."

"But you were a father to me first, when I came to you a stranger, and —" She stopped. He did not notice that the sentence was unfinished.

"Would you have given me the right to call you daughter in the end?" he said.

"Perhaps," she replied shyly, and he asked no further.

"I am glad the land is all secure for Geysbert," he said. "You will learn yet to love the city. As for Helmer, he is happier at the manor house."

She made him no reply. His words were not easy to answer.

"She will recover," said the doctor briefly, when he had seen madam. "Only keep her very quiet."

Then he went to Pieter.

"You'll not pull me through, doctor," said the old man wistfully. "But you've done a bigger work than that. You've saved *her*."

"Saved her? Of course I have. What am I here for but to save my patients?" he replied, but he gave no opinion as to Pieter's condition, and he met Aveline's inquiring look with a stony gaze that did not encourage further questioning.

Aveline's heart was heavy when she saw him depart. Madam must be kept quiet, and Pieter insisted on being left alone so that her every want might be anticipated. He made no complaint himself.

"I'll just lie still here," he said. "I'm no more use. You'll have to do for her all by yourself, my poor lass."

"It is not that," said Aveline, "but I cannot bear to leave you. It looks as if nobody cared, and I *do* care. You have been so good to me."

That night madam insisted that she should rest, and she crept softly to Pieter's side. He looked up in a dull way as she entered. She put her hand in his. His fingers closed about it.

"It is warm with life," he said. "I am too old to have any more warm life. *She'll* get well. She's younger than I am. I'm cold, child, deadly cold. Life and warmth are gone from me."

He looked at her pitifully. His fingers were stiff and chilled. She hurried to put hot coals in the brass warming-pan, and raise some artificial heat in the bed. She warmed woollen clothing and laid it against him. In spite of her efforts no warm blood rose to send the blue, chill look from his hands.

"Never mind, my lass," he said. "Life and warmth are good, but they won't last. Don't try any more. It's no use. Sit here and put your hand in mine — so. It is warm, and — it is not so hard to die without Wyntie."

Her tears were falling fast. One dropped hot on his hand.

"You'll comfort Geysbert — and Helmer. Helmer's a good boy — the best of the two. His mother knows it — but somehow — Geysbert has been his father's boy always."

There was a sound in madam's room.

"Go! She needs you," he said, and the feeble hand tried to loose its grasp. It was almost too stiff for the task.

"It was only the cracking of a stick in the fire," said Aveline, returning.

"And Wyntie?"

"She is asleep."

"Don't tell her till you are forced," he said. "She must get better now."

Then he was silent for a long time. Once or twice his lips moved, but when Aveline bent her head to listen, no sound came. He was speaking, but not to her. She kept silence reverently. Suddenly he spoke again.

"I'm cold — deadly cold," he said.

"Wyntie —" But the voice failed. The chill of death swept resistlessly over the warm old heart, and froze it into stillness. His wife's name was the last he spoke.

When madam woke and called for her, Aveline could leave him without fear. She went about her duties for the invalid, scarcely knowing that she did them. She was stunned by the shock. Yesterday morning he had taken his share of the burdens. Aveline remembered how slowly and wearily he had struggled through them. Her heart ached as she realized the bravery of that lonely fight with pain and exhaustion. She had hard work to hide her agitation from madam, but for Pieter's sake she fought off the weakness.

"He kept up for her to the very last," she said. "I will not fail him now, and undo his work."

"You must keep it from her for another day or two," said the doctor when he came. "I will arrange for the funeral. Even a day may mean everything to her."

Aveline shrank from the moment when she must tell madam, and the dread of it grew upon her as the day passed. Madam watched her closely. She did not once ask after her husband, but she kept her eyes upon the door, and her ears were open to every sound. Every minute Aveline was expecting the question that did not come. But as the light was fading out of the sky, and she was returning from a journey downstairs, madam greeted her with—

"If Pieter had the fever you would stay away longer than you do."

The girl stood still in the doorway. Her heart also stood still on its own account.

"I did not mean to stay," she faltered.

"That is neither here nor there, child. You have not stayed. Why did you not, if Pieter were taken?"

"He has not the fever," said Aveline faintly.

"No. I know that."

There was silence. Aveline came in and shut the door. A sense of the presence of death on the other

side of the hall prompted the action. She felt as if she must shut that presence away from madam.

"Come here, child."

There was a change in the voice. It had lost hope. Aveline obeyed.

"Pieter would come to me if he were well, and if he were sick you would go to him. What follows?"

"Oh, madam!"

Aveline bent her head, and softly put her lips to the white forehead. Madam put up her hand—a hand so weak and thin—and drew the face into a position where she could see it well.

"Tell me," she said.

"It was just like Pieter." It was the only comment she made when all was told.

"Go away now, and leave me to myself," she said, after a long silence.

Aveline went, fearful and trembling. Had the sudden shock rendered futile all Pieter's efforts? She knew it had not when she returned.

"I am going to get better to look after Pieter's boys and Pieter's possessions," madam said firmly, and she kept her word.

From that moment progress was rapid. She had set her will on the side of recovery, and madam's will was not to be despised. To get well was a duty she owed to Pieter, and she got well. She would not allow Geysbert or Helmer to be sent for.

"Coming into the air of this doomed city would be fatal for them," she said.

For the same reason she decided that Pieter should be buried in New York. The usual funeral pomp amongst tenants and acquaintances must be omitted. Another solemn procession passed through the streets of the city. A funeral was a common sight now. Death was coming to be an every-day acquaintance. Through

that summer he never allowed men to forget his presence. He was the town's uninvited guest, and he stayed.

Over in Jamaica, Long Island, Lord Cornbury administered the affairs of the province, and the city was left to its desolation. When it was over, men called that summer the time of the great sickness. It left the city as a whole five hundred souls the poorer, and robbed individual homes of their best treasures.

CHAPTER XXII

“WELCOME to the manor house, my child, though of a truth it is hardly fair to show it to you thus for the first time.”

Madam Feljer was at home again. She entered the house quickly. The summer sun fell full on the figure of the girl who awaited her, standing in the hall with her face turned towards the light. Involuntarily madam stopped. It was five years since she had seen this girl, and the years between fifteen and twenty are potent to evolve the woman from the child. Madam was bewildered. Was this the little Puritan maid whom she had gone to comfort when Catharine, madam's only sister, died? The conditions were reversed now.

“The house of mourning is better than the house of feasting.”

The voice was low and musical. It had in it a suggestion of the music of wind and water, but it was the wind sighing among the winter boughs, and the rhythmical moan of the sea before a storm. It was the harmony of sadness rather than the melody of joy.

The girl advanced towards madam as she spoke, and held out both her hands. Then she stooped and kissed the face that was lifted to hers.

“Dear Aunt Wyntie,” she said softly, “the waters of affliction are deep and cold.”

Madam did not reply. For a minute she folded the girl in her arms, then she held her off and looked at her. Those big, dark, sad eyes were the child Probity's eyes, but the face was changed. It had more than fulfilled its promise of good looks, but it had prepared some surprises. The mouth, over-large for the oval face, was

too firm for the softer testimony of the eyes. The features belied each other. The nose belonged to the mouth, but the chin and forehead claimed affinity with the eyes. Just now the whole face was agreed. It was tender and sympathetic.

"You have grown amazingly, child. You must be — yes — you *are* taller than Aveline."

She was standing very straight and still, her lithe, slight figure looking taller in madam's presence. Possibly she drew herself up a trifle higher at the words, but the movement was scarcely perceptible.

"You have seen her — Aveline Nevard?"

Madam asked the question a little eagerly. Her niece had been awaiting her when she returned from the house of a tenant. She had removed her out-door garments, and looked as if she had already become at home in the manor house. Madam judged that her wants had been attended to, possibly by Aveline herself.

"I have been here fully half an hour. Yes — I have seen your maid."

"My daughter," said madam quickly. "Aveline has performed the duty of a loving daughter to me and Pieter. She was as a daughter to us even before."

"I understood from your letter that she had well learned her duty, and had not shrunk from performing it," said the girl. "It is well that one brought up amidst the vanities of the world, as I doubt not she has been, had grace enough so far to forget self."

The mouth was predominant now.

"You do not know Aveline," said madam quietly, but she looked keenly at her niece. "How did you find your way up from the landing?" she asked, after a moment's silence.

"My cousin Geysbert perceived the yacht before she neared her stopping place, and was at the landing to meet me. I did not lack the kindest of welcomes."

"That is well, for we are sufficiently glad to see you. I must send my thanks to your father for sparing you to us for an indefinite period. I take it kindly of Strivewell."

"My father was not unwilling to spare me," said the girl. "He bade me stay as long as I could be of service, or until he himself should recall me."

There was a gleam in madam's eye that was not called forth by the actual words of her niece. She was thinking that she understood Strivewell Thaxter's willingness to bereave himself of the companionship of his only child. There was a part of madam's letter to the old Puritan that had not been intended for Probity's eye. Aye, and it had not reached Probity's eye. Strivewell Thaxter was a father of the olden type, a type that even in those earliest years of the eighteenth century was already the old. Strivewell had trained his daughter for another world than the one in which he thought he beheld nothing but vanity, yet he believed firmly that the saints should possess the earth, and there was a decent little piece of the earth that would eventually fall into the hands of Wyntie Feljer's sons. Strivewell was no hypocrite, but he was very human.

"What! My cousin Probity? And you came when none was looking for you?"

Helmer threw wide open the door, and strode in with a pleased smile on his face.

"Not so," said Probity. "There was one who was looking. Geysbert was at home to receive me."

"Lucky Geysbert," said Helmer, and he claimed a cousin's privilege, and kissed the soft cheek that for the moment lost its ivory tint.

As he lifted his head, he saw Aveline standing in the open doorway. There was a flush on her face, and a look in her eyes that brought the quick words to Helmer's lips.

"What is it? There is something wrong."

"Kip," she said; and the muscles about her mouth worked sympathetically.

Now, if there was anything on earth that Helmer held especially dear, it was his dog Kip. Ever since Kip was a puppy, five years ago, the two had been inseparable. It would have been hard to tell which would have stood the greater test, the love of the young man for the dog, or the love of the dog for the youth, his master.

"Where is he?" he asked hurriedly.

"By the Near Field. The reapers are at work there. His leg is broken."

The words came with a smothered sob. Aveline too loved Kip.

"Who did it?"

Helmer was already outside the door, taking rapid strides in the direction of the Near Field.

"Geysbert."

Her voice was low, but it reached his ears. He stopped, and turned towards her.

"Go," she said. "He is in need of you."

Helmer went without another word, but his lips were pressed tightly together.

He did not know that Aveline's sympathies drew her feet in the direction his own were taking, nor that Probity turned to her aunt when he was gone, and said:

"If you see no harm in the action, I will follow my cousin Helmer. There were signs in his face of that heat of spirit which may kindle strife."

"Nonsense, child," said madam. "You may go where you like, but Helmer and Geysbert understand each other well enough to be in no danger of being put materially apart, though once and again they may find cause to quarrel in brotherly style."

But when her niece was gone, madam stood in the hall and looked out at the bright sunshine. Her hands

were, for a wonder, unoccupied, and her face was troubled. It was older-looking by years than when she left the manor house for New York. Her neighbours said the fever had told on her. Madam said: "Pieter and I have lived too long together for either to take up the whole of life again without the other. You are looking for Wyntie Feljer, the wife of Pieter. You see Wyntie Feljer, the widow, and you give the fever the credit for the change."

Probity had no difficulty in finding her way to the Near Field. It lay just back of the barn, and she could see the reapers at work there as she came nearer, and hear the voice of her cousin Geysbert.

"Better shoot the brute and be done with it."

Geysbert stood inside the field, looking over the fence. On his knees in the roadway Helmer was bending over Kip, his movements now and then eliciting a quick yelp of pain, which was instantly atoned for by an attempt to lick the hands that were pressing into the torn and crushed flesh of the dog's leg. Helmer was trying to bring the edges of the broken bone together.

"Which brute do you mean? I recognize but one just now. The law doesn't allow that kind of brute to be shot."

Helmer did not look up as he spoke. He was intent on getting the bone in position. Geysbert understood the tone, however.

"You want a bandage."

It was Aveline's voice. Helmer had not known that she was there. He looked up surprised, but there was no surprise on Geysbert's face.

"It was good of you to think of it," said Helmer, and their eyes met as he took the strip of soft linen, and the splint she had hastily procured. Tyte had placed himself at Helmer's elbow to watch proceedings. Nothing escaped his sharp eyes. He had already en-

lightened Mars'r Helmer as to the particular crack in the rough logs by the gate where Kip had caught his foot when Geysbert urged the oxen forward.

"Dat where he catch himself. Mars'r Geysbert make the oxen go, for sure," said the small Tyte.

Helmer's face darkened as he listened, but all the time he was exa nining Kip's leg. Now, as he drew the bandage tight, he found time to look up. Something in Geysbert's eye exasperated him.

"The next time you want to hurt me, don't do it through a dog," he said, in a tone that, low as it was, reached Probity's ears where she stood, out by the corner of the barn. "It is a method that is not altogether safe."

"Anger is never safe, cousin Helmer."

She drew nearer.

"Well said, fair cousin. You must teach Helmer here to look at life through your eyes. According to your motto he is often in danger."

Geysbert laughed aggravatingly, and then stood and noted the flush his words brought to another face than Helmer's.

"It is worth running over a dog to attract such fair sympathizers," he added, after a moment's silence

"Do you think so?"

There was a ring in Aveline's voice that was not unnoticed by Geysbert, though he chose to ignore it.

"Surely," he replied. "Nothing less would have called together the present company."

"Or have given so good an opportunity for character to display itself," said Aveline, the colour in her cheeks deepening.

Geysbert looked annoyed, but he stood his ground.

"Kip is a lucky dog," he remarked.

The dog's great sorrowful eyes were turned upward at the sound of his name.

"Come, Kip," said Helmer shortly. "Better try and get out of the way, old boy. It might be found inconvenient to avoid driving over you when the oxen return."

"You're a peppery fellow," said Geysbert, and turned away whistling.

Probity laid her hand on Helmer's arm.

"Cousin," she said, "the avoidance of unjust judgment is as shining a virtue as compassion itself. The rarely beautiful gift of brotherly love is worth seeking for."

"That's right, Probity. Give him a little cousinly advice. He is in sad need of it," said Geysbert, over his shoulder.

He nodded familiarly to his cousin, including Aveline in the action, and went whistling across the field to where the oxen stood yoked to the big wagon. He chuckled a little to himself.

Probity had proved very helpful. He began to see that cousins might be useful on occasion.

He was not sorry for Kip. Had it been any other dog than Kip he might have been sorry. Had it been any other dog than Kip he would probably have been less impetuous. He had seen the animal, and carelessly noted his movements as he caught his foot in the rough bridge by the gate. A negro on the other side had even called — "Look out, Mars'r Geysbert!" but the warning was late. Geysbert had already urged on the oxen. The wagon rolled forward. Of course he had expected that the brute would look out for himself, and if not — why, he must take the consequences. Thus he had reasoned, when that sharp scream of pain told him that Kip had *not* been able to look out for himself. He did not reason now; he smiled, and exulted a little.

Pieter Feljer was right. One plum for two mouths was a tantalizing morsel. It had proved more tantaliz-

ing than he had realized, and the mouth that was like to get the least of it found in itself a bitter taste.

Since the day of the chaise-party feeling had not been as of old between Geysbert and Helmer. The quarrel with Myndert had further widened the breach. Neither Helmer nor Geysbert could quite get rid of the idea that the latter was involved in the quarrel, and when, one day, Helmer found himself called upon to give the savage insolence of young Myndert an effectual lesson, Geysbert chose to take the matter as a personal affront.

As for Myndert himself, he could never forgive Helmer for laying him low in the presence of his own slaves, and though, after the further development of the case, he had a wholesome dread of the strength of Helmer's arm, he watched for an opportunity to get even with him without danger to himself.

The weeks during which Pieter and Madam Feljer were in New York were not, on the whole, peaceable ones at the manor house. Pieter Feljer's death, and madam's return, had for the time caused all differences to be forgotten, but the breach was not healed.

Aveline and Probity walked from the Near Field together. They could hardly help walking together, because it was the most natural thing to do. But just now it was not the easiest. There was some difficulty in being non-partisan. Aveline had herself witnessed the affair of the oxen, though from some distance, and her sympathies were with Kip — and Kip's master. The flush had not yet left her cheek. She did not know how that warmer hue, and the fire in her eyes, lent brilliancy to a face that Probity had already decided possessed too much carnal beauty to be of anything but the earth. Probity turned her head to gain a good view of the face under its present aspect. She even leant forward, ever so slightly, the more effectually to compass

her purpose. The charm of that face deepened the disapproval in Probit's eyes. She concluded that the flush of anger unmistakably betokened an earthward tendency.

"You have not yet entered upon the blessed office of peacemaker in my aunt's household," she said, and the music in her voice was less soothing than when she greeted her aunt.

Aveline darted an interrogatory glance at her.

"No — possibly because hitherto there has arisen no strife-maker," she said, after a perceptible interval.

"My cousin Helmer has, I think, less control of his passions than has Geysbert," said Probit. "It is a great thing to so discipline the will that it shall not yield before the onslaughts of temptation."

Aveline made no answer. Possibly she found her own passions not completely under control at that moment.

"Well, did you find your kind offices necessary?" asked madam, as the two entered the house.

"Yes — very necessary, I think," said Probit slowly, while Aveline, who supposed the question to refer to the splint and the bandage with which she had provided herself, replied quietly:

"The splint came in useful."

Madam looked keenly from one to the other.

"Physicians for the mind and the body," she said drily.

CHAPTER XXIII

“WELL, what is the judgment?”

Probity turned her face suddenly towards her aunt. There was a slight flush on it, caused by the unexpected question. She removed her eyes from the two figures disappearing in the gathering darkness. Probity had not known that it was a case of double study. Ever since Geysbert and Aveline ascended the hill she had been watching them with an intent earnestness that meant more than mere curiosity. Now she knew that madam had been watching her.

She hesitated a moment before answering. Then her words came slowly. She was weighing each one.

“About Aveline? She is winsome — surely — and good — in a measure. But I think, dear aunt Wyntie, that when you bought her for your maid, you bought much trouble along with her. She is over-winsome, and not good enough.”

“Where will you find a better?” Madam spoke curtly.

“Truly that were no light task.”

Probity paused. Her eyes had gone back to their watching. The two had turned now, and were coming back, lingering to look at the brightening red of the line of fire down the river, ostensibly the reason for their evening stroll. Probity had been generously asked to share the walk to the point where a better view of the fire was to be obtained. That she decided to stay with madam on the wide piazza was not altogether due to thoughtfulness for her aunt Wyntie.

“Looked at through your eyes,” she resumed — “and perchance through other eyes than yours — she has

much, you would possibly say everything, to recommend her. Yet, dear aunt, even to you it must appear that peace is better than strife."

"What has peace to do with it? The child is peaceable enough, in all truth."

"And peace-destroying enough."

Madam sighed. It was a short, impatient sigh.

"That is no fault of hers," she said.

"May I speak plainly, aunt Wyntie?" Probity asked the question doubtfully.

"Surely, child. What is the use of beating about the bush?"

"Then, dear aunt, is it not fault of yours?"

"Scarcely," said madam shortly.

"Would it be an injustice to the girl if you should give her, or allow her to purchase, her freedom, with the understanding that she seek her brother's protection?"

"Banish the sun because the plants turn their faces too persistently towards it, eh?"

Madam's eyes shone a little in the growing darkness.

"Better so than that the plants should be deformed by overmuch turning," said Probity gravely.

"You never liked Aveline," commented madam.

Probity hesitated.

"Possibly your accusation is just," she said. "Such attraction as hers, mere carnal beauty, does not of itself appeal to me. Yet I would not be unfair to her. With more heart-training, with the discipline that such a spirit as hers sadly needs, I doubt not she might yet become an estimable character, and her external beauty be the symbol of inward loveliness."

"You are gracious."

The tone was sarcastic. It brought a deeper tint to Probity's cheek. She had thought she was speaking in moderation and fairness; she was certainly trying to be just.

"I would not willingly be *ungracious*," she said softly. "If my words seem harsh, it is because of the weight of earnestness behind them. My heart is sometimes heavy by reason of that to which I cannot shut my eyes. It is six weeks since I came to this house of mourning, and not one has passed in which it has not become the house of strife."

"You take things too seriously," said madam; but the words struck home.

"It may in truth be so. I was ever of a serious disposition," began Probity; but her speech was cut short by the appearance of a small negro boy, running as if life depended on his expedition.

Geysbert and Aveline were at that moment coming near again. The boy hesitated, went a step towards them, and then changed his mind and mounted the piazza steps. His rapid run toned down to a solemn walk as he approached madam. He made a grotesque attempt at a bow. Tyte was always very ceremonious to Mars'r Helmer's mother.

"Well, Tyte, what is it?"

"Mars'r Helmer say will Missy Av'line and Missy Pro'ty go down to de landing? He get a boat and take dem to see de fire. Mars'r Helmer say it very fine to-night."

"So! And have you no invitation for me?" asked madam.

Tyte shook his head gravely.

"No, mad'm. Mars'r Helmer only say Missy Av'line and Missy Pro'ty. He tell me bring him word so he know."

Aveline had drawn near.

"To see the fire?" she asked.

"Yes, missy. Mars'r Helmer want you and Missy Pro'ty."

Tyte was overflowing with importance.

"Tell him we will come — that is, if —"

She broke off, and looked at Probity.

Probity did not speak. She was searching Geysbert's face.

"That is, if you so desire," continued Aveline, in a less energetic tone. "For myself, I have wished to see the fire more closely since it first began to grow big and imposing."

"What think you, cousin Geysbert? Will the sight be worth the making up of a party to go and see it?" asked Probity.

"Possibly you might think so," said her cousin. "From the water it is often grand."

"Then I will go, provided you engage to do the honours," she replied.

Long after their voices had died away madam sat watching the line of light a short distance down, on the other side of the Hudson. The new owners of the land had borrowed from the Indians the custom of setting the underbrush of the woods on fire in the autumn. The clearance thus effected facilitated hunting and made the grass grow better in the spring. Madam's eyes were turned towards the bright glow, but her thoughts were not with them.

"I was a foolish old woman to flatter myself that I could mend matters," she said to herself at last, and again there was that impatient sigh.

Madam was just now in the position of one who, seeking to guide events, finds that the steeds have the bit between their teeth. She had imagined her hand to be very effectually on the reins when she sent that letter to Strivewell Thaxter. The letter had not failed of its purpose, as Probity's presence testified, but events were none the less refractory.

"Six weeks since she came, is it?" mused madam. "Six weeks, and no whit the forwarder with either the

one or the other. It is not the fault of her face, for truly 'tis but a question of taste which is the handsomer of the two."

The purpose which had given strength to madam's determination to get well was to-day as firm as ever. To carry out Pieter's wishes, and see Pieter's lads happy and prosperous according to his ideas, was the task to the accomplishment of which she set herself with her usual energetic decision. Everything was in her hands, for Pieter had never doubted that madam's wisdom was greater than his own, and madam herself had never had the smallest doubt of that wisdom — until now. Now, with two lads and two lasses on her hands, she was unwillingly convinced that there were not enough lasses for the lads, and perchance, also, not enough lads for the lasses.

"She is a good maid, and Catharine's own girl. I would gladly welcome her as a daughter," said madam. "If Geysbert had only eyes to see — but he is strangely blind."

She rose and walked the length of the piazza. She did not notice how the time was passing. A brighter light shot up into the sky from the neighbourhood of the river.

"The tree-tops are catching fire," said madam. "The sight will be worth seeing."

She sat down again, and her thoughts wandered to Pieter. His heart had been set on seeing Aveline Geysbert's wife. To madam it would have been greater joy to know that Helmer — Well, never mind. Pieter's desire must be accomplished, if possible, only — was it possible? Geysbert should have every facility to win Aveline — if he could — and Helmer might yet solace himself with Probity. She had hoped that Geysbert's desire would change, that he would have the wish of his heart, and that wish be — Probity. Now she was wiser.

"Surely it is getting late."

Madam passed into the house to consult Pieter's big silver watch. Pieter had been proud of that watch, and madam made it the standard of time at the manor house. Now, as she approached it, it lifted up its voice, as if in reproach, and solemnly struck ten musical strokes. From the holes in the massive silver case, purposely made to let out the sound, each stroke came with a note of warning.

"Ten o'clock, and they are not back yet! Nor coming," added madam, as she hastily returned to her post of observation, and bent her head to listen.

Crickets chirped, and frogs croaked with exasperating loudness, but there was nothing else to be heard. The world of the manor house was asleep, but Pieter's watch was awake and working. Once again it made its voice heard, proclaiming that it lacked but an hour of midnight. Madam was becoming alarmed.

"Surely something must be wrong," she said aloud, and as if in answer came the words: "All right! Here we are."

"Helmer! What can you have been thinking about to stay out so late?" she called sharply.

Helmer and the two girls were coming rapidly towards her.

"Thinking of? Being caught in the fire. At least that was the fate that threatened my cousin," replied Helmer. "Here she is. I give her back into your hands safe and sound. It is not Geysbert's fault that I am able to do so."

He spoke lightly, but there was an undertone that made madam ask imperatively:

"What do you mean? Where have you all been?"

"In the boat, so far as half the all are concerned," said Helmer. "Aveline and I were wise, and kept to safe ground, but my cousin here was led astray."

Probity stepped up to her aunt, and the light from the open door fell on her face. It was paler than usual.

"Dear aunt," she said, "the story would be more calmly told after it has been slept over. We were in some danger, but we were mercifully preserved. Will you give permission to leave all remark upon the occurrence until the morning?"

Her voice was not as full and rich as usual. There was a tired ring in it that did not escape Helmer's notice.

"Poor cousin," he said, "it was unduly hard on you. You were more frightened than you acknowledged. Yet, if you *will* be so brave, you must not be surprised that you meet with little sympathy."

"I *am* tired. I think I will go in—and to rest," said Probity. "Cousin Helmer, I would fain ask you to do the same."

He was silent for a moment. Then he held out his hand.

"You may cry victory, fair preacher," he said. "I will keep the peace."

"I take it kindly of you that you give the promise so readily," she said.

There was a slight gasp at the end of her words. Helmer's right hand had lightly touched her left as he moved away. She passed quickly into the house, and upstairs to her own room.

"Helmer!"

In all his life Helmer had never disregarded that tone. He stopped and faced round.

"What is all this about?"

"Ask Geysbert."

"I asked you."

"Nothing but a bit of foolhardiness on Geysbert's part. He could best explain it himself. I have promised to keep the peace." He broke off with an awkward laugh.

"There is none to quarrel with here," said madam coldly. "I desire an explanation."

"It is easily given. We ran down below the fire, and sat looking at it. Then Geysbert wished to persuade the maidens to go ashore. He declared it to be safe, and promised them the sight of many fire-driven creatures escaping for their lives. I warned him the wind was turning to north. If I had held my peace, perchance he would not have been so determined."

Helmer spoke bitterly.

"And then?"

"Aveline stayed, but Probity decided to run the risk. And she ran it. A sudden rising of the wind sent the flames sweeping round the bit of marshy land to which they had made their way, and before they were aware of it, they were almost hemmed in. We shouted, and put in to shore, but Probity had a fall, and the heat of the flames was intense before the boat was reached."

"And Geysbert? What excuse did he give?"

"He vouchsafed none."

"That will do. It would be as well for you to follow Probity's advice."

Madam's voice was hard, but she put her hand on her younger son's arm.

He stooped and kissed her, and that night he carefully avoided meeting with his brother.

"Aunt Wyntie!"

Madam was passing her niece's door. It stood ajar.

"What, child! Not yet abed?"

"I desired greatly to spare you anxiety, but my efforts to properly arrange this bandage have been without avail. I must even ask your help," said Probity.

"Help? You are not hurt?"

"Not seriously. I had a fall —"

"Yes, I know."

Probity looked at her inquiringly.

"No. There has been nothing of what you call strife. What about the fall?"

"I saved myself with my left hand. The wrist received a twist."

"And you said nothing about it. Foolish child!"

But madam bandaged the sprained member with skillful fingers, and stayed by her niece until she saw her safe in bed.

"There, go to sleep, and leave the knots of life to be straightened out by more clever fingers than yours," she said kindly.

It seemed that other minds than Probit's were exercised about those same knots. It was only the next day that Madam Feljer stood in the cool dairy watching the filling of a tub with butter. To all appearance she was intent on the butter-making, yet when Ryseck Schredel suddenly lifted her head and began to speak, the words seemed but an echo of madam's own thought.

"I don't call myself quite a fool," she said, "and what I can't do, I don't reckon any other body's going to do either. And *I* never found it any use yet to offer a child a bit of a lighted candle when it was crying for the moon. It's nothing but a wicked waste of the candle."

Ryseck allowed her eyes to wander from the tub of butter over which she was pouring the fresh pickle. Then she straightened herself and faced Madam Feljer as she added:

"You may send all the way to New England, or to Old Nederland, or anywhere else, to get the finest and best of candles, but the lad that wants the moon will take nothing less."

Madam looked at her fixedly.

"There is only one moon," she said.

"To be sure. And while it shines on both, neither the one nor the other will be content with less."

She bent over the butter again. The pickle did not yet fill the tub. For Ryseck to take her eyes off a tub of butter when it was not yet properly salted and prepared, was so unusual a circumstance that it might in itself account for madam's silent gaze. Ryseck had not come all the way from Holland for the express purpose of attending to the Feljer dairy, to have the butter anything else than worthy of herself. She gave no further sign that any subject save that of butter-making was capable of attracting her attention. It was not until the tub was filled to her satisfaction, and carefully bestowed in the cool tile-lined press where it could by no possibility come in contact with any odour, or—that greater abomination—any uncleanness, that another word was spoken. Then madam said:

"The moon will shine, though all the world should cry for it."

"Not on every spot at once," replied Ryseck sagely, and her inquisitorial eyes had time now to return madam's scrutiny.

"I was foolish enough to think there might be found another moon," said madam, with a smile that was not without some bitterness.

Ryseck shook her head.

"'Tis not in Mistress Probity that the fault is to be found," she said. "Eyes that are dazzled with overmuch light are not to be blamed if they fail to see clearly. Neither the one nor the other has an eye to spy out her virtues. If she had come first, they might have been fighting for her now, though, to be sure, they are neither of them fools."

Which latter statement rather clearly indicated that Ryseck's own eyes were a little affected in the matter of partial vision.

Madam looked at her intently.

"Better be content with butter-moulding, and leave

events to mould themselves, or there may perchance be two foolish women instead of one," she said.

But when, on that same day, there seemed to come an opportunity to do a little moulding on her own account, madam did not follow out her own advice.

Probity was set aside from active 'duty to-day. Madam insisted on it, and Aveline, with a little compunction for her lively partisanship of the night before, was very tender and attentive to her. Her ministrations lasted until just before the noonday meal, and then she was surely to be excused if the sprained wrist was only remembered spasmodically, and with little penitent efforts to atone for the forgetfulness. For with Fulke present, watching his sister's movements, and winning for himself a nod or two of approbation from madam, as he discoursed on his plans, and incidentally gave proof of his successes, Aveline's attention was necessarily much divided.

Fulke's last winter's experiment of trading to the West Indies was to be repeated, and he was on his way to take practical charge of the same sloop, her skipper being already in New York awaiting his arrival. The yacht in which he had descended the river was loaded with Albany flour, than which there was no better — and scarce as good — to be found in the province, and a few horses had been added as a further venture.

The young man was the Fulke of London days considerably modified. The dash which had made him one with some of the most reckless youths of the city, was still clearly discernible. In truth, it was this dash — bordering on recklessness — which had first attracted Roger Bennet's attention.

"The lad is as capable of putting himself into the accomplishing of a dangerous bit of business, as of putting his soul into the turn of a bow or the hang of a rag of lace," he had decided.

At the present time Roger was taking to himself no small amount of credit for discernment. His partner was making money for both, and was justifying Roger's action in bringing him over the sea.

Madam was benevolent — decidedly so. The lad was prospering, and prosperity was a sign of wit and worth. She welcomed him cordially, and took considerable interest in the news he brought from Albany.

"And my Lord Cornbury? You have, I think, had the good gentleman in Albany this summer," she said.

"Yes, and he has shown much dignity and discretion. I have not heard that he has once personated his illustrious cousin, Queen Anne, or done aught that could detract from an honourable name," said Fulke. "He was good enough to show me some kindness, and to give me one or two small commissions to execute for him in his dealing with the Indians whom he came to meet."

"Ah, a great conference, I doubt not," replied madam, "and the good governor has surely done much to keep the natives in their duty and allegiance to their sovereign."

"Oh, the covenant chain is exceptionally bright just at present," responded Fulke, laughing. "It will not grow rusty so long as the powder and knives and rum of the governor's present are on hand to brighten it. When they are done with, it may suddenly become dimmed."

"Yes, it requires much wisdom to keep them from going over to our French enemies," said madam. "Yet they of the Five Nations have been to us a wall against the foe."

"Far be it from me to quarrel with my bread and butter," said Fulke, with mock earnestness. "Truly they are not altogether a foolish people. At times

their actions show them to be veritable courtiers. At this very conference the sachems of these nations honoured his Excellency by appearing before his lodging and singing a mournful song which they had made upon the death of his late Majesty, King William the Third, of blessed memory."

"Did they so?" said madam. "It was well meant. Such a spirit of loyalty must have made the conference an easier matter to my Lord Cornbury."

"Aye, but if these wily natives can flatter, they can speak plainly too," returned Fulke. "The governor had an opportunity of judging of the astuteness of the Indian mind when Onuchenanorum, a sachem of the Maquase, stood up and solemnly informed his Excellency that one of the reasons why so many of their brethren traded with Canada was that the Albany weights, with which we weigh the bear and other skins, are too heavy withal, and that they did not consider themselves fairly treated by the traders. He further affirmed that the best way to draw their Indians back again from Canada was to let the goods be cheaper, a means of attracting them which would doubtless prove effective."

"The good man was in earnest about the cheapening of the goods," commented madam. "Unquestionably the subject lay near his heart."

"That did it," replied Fulke, "for it went so far as to affect his religious views. He declared the willingness of his people to consult about having ministers in their castles, to instruct them, in the place of the French priests. But this too was conditional on the cheapness of the goods, for when the goods were cheaper Onuchenanorum argued that the Indian could afford to buy a good honest coat to go to church withal, for it would be scandalous to come to church with a bear-skin on his back."

"Not a bad argument for the red man," said madam, laughing.

"Their sachems are surely not without worldly wisdom," said Fulke, "or one of them would not have gravely proposed to my Lord Cornbury that his generous gift of fifty kegs of rum should be bestowed in some safe place until the conference was over, since they were but now just begun, and if their people should fall a-drinking they would be unfit for business. The proposal was worthy of a statesman."

"Truly. And was it listened to?"

"It was. Mr. Livingston's cellar was appointed as the place of custody for this dangerous gift. Yet did not the conference end without disaster. A sachem of the River Indians perished at the hands of those dastardly negroes, and four black necks were sentenced to wear the halter."

Madam nodded.

"'Tis right that the Indian should learn that our nation values his life," she said. "It was well that the murderers were executed."

Aveline shuddered.

"Poor creatures," she said. "Possibly they knew but little more than the red men themselves."

"The halter would teach them," replied Fulke lightly.

"Truly, Justice is a hard teacher," said Probity slowly, "yet the transgressor must needs learn her lessons."

"In this case he did not so learn. At least only one of the transgressors came under the rod," said Fulke, turning to Probity. "Mercy stepped in, and in no less strange a guise than an Indian sachem. The River Indians declared themselves satisfied that our people had done all in their power for their wounded brother, even going so far as to be willing to avenge his death, but they desired no more lives to be lost, and they

pleaded that death should not overtake the murderers."

"And my Lord Cornbury? What answer did he make to that?" demanded madam.

"The answer of clapping the halter about the neck of the ringleader, and reserving the rest for the royal judgment," replied Fulke. "He mingled stern justice with mercy, and duly impressed the savage mind therewith, and further healed the wounded spirits of the Indians by promising that the friends of the murdered man should be compensated for their loss according to Indian usage. Oh, the new governor is a sufficiently discreet man, and well instructed in his dealings with the natives."

"I do not doubt it. I thought him a kindly gentleman and a wise governor when we met him in New York," replied madam.

And then she sighed, and relapsed into silence, and the young men talked together of Fulke's movements.

"You're a lucky fellow," remarked Helmer. "No droning in the country for you this winter, but change of scene and fresh adventures all the time."

"Better take a trip with me," suggested Fulke.

"Not I. I'm a drone by nature. The manor house and the snow suit me," replied Helmer, laughing.

Yet when Fulke's yacht left the landing-place on the following morning, Helmer was on board, having turned his back on the manor house for a period of three months. It came about as a result of madam's moulding, and was intended to bring that peace on behalf of which Probity's mind was exercised.

There was at the back of the manor house a room opening into a narrow passage. The tenants knew it well, for here Pieter Feljer first, and now madam herself, transacted all business connected with the estate. It was when passing the door of this room that Helmer

heard his mother's voice calling him, and turned in. Then it was that madam did an unheard-of thing, and one that few who knew her would have given her credit for. She frankly owned herself unequal to the occasion that had arisen, and appealed to her son for help. There was a long and hot argument, but madam came off the victor. And what was more, the vanquished was not altogether dissatisfied.

"The present position is anything but satisfactory," he said. "I will go, and when Yorke booms with New Year's guns, I will start for home. And then I will stand aside for no one."

"You will not need to stand aside. Geysbert shall understand that he has three months in which to win or lose. After that the field is open."

It was not all magnanimity that prompted Helmer to leave the manor house and Aveline at this juncture. He thought he was so far sure of his ground that he had less to fear from going than from staying. Aveline might or might not love him, but she did not love Geysbert. Madam did not deny the assertion.

"Let him find it out his own way," she said. "He will take it less hard when you are out of sight. He is the elder, and in a manner he is entitled to the first chance. So your father thought. Let him have it. Afterwards, should he find that the prize is not for him, he cannot blame you. Your father's sons cannot afford to quarrel, even for Aveline."

"But you will not attempt to coerce her? She is to be allowed fair play?"

Helmer spoke hastily. It was a contingency that had not occurred to him before.

"It is full time you left home, when it comes to doubting my honour," said madam. "Neither of my sons is the lad his father knew. Truly, love is a strange

thing, since it brings enough hatred in its train to set a whole household by the ears."

And that was her last word on the subject.

Helmer could not have sworn that he was not glad to bring matters to a crisis. He would have spoken to Aveline before, but it seemed no time for wooing. Then, when Geysbert's animosity showed itself vigorously, he feared to distress his mother by the outburst that must follow any avowal on his part. He waited impatiently, chafing at the restraint. It would be better to go anywhere than to be always living over a mine that might any day explode. He did not fear Geysbert's influence — much. But he would have been glad if the three months' probation had been over.

CHAPTER XXIV

WINTER was belated, or the fifteenth of December would never have found the Hudson open, and the ground unblanketed. And something beside winter was belated. Geysbert had felt it for a long time—the tardiness of his wooing of Aveline. It surely was not his fault. His ardour was strong enough to overcome any obstacle but one—and that a girl's will.

Geysbert had been very amiable for the past ten weeks, and very gay. Probity had felt the charm of his manner, and yielded herself to it. Since Helmer's departure there had been no more "strife" at the manor house. Madam watched events, and sighed once or twice as she realized that the departure of her younger son had brought peace. She had expected it, and yet—it did not quite please her.

Geysbert was at his very best during those weeks. Madam could see no cause for complaint, and she did not complain. But she looked more than a little anxiously for the crisis. It would have come sooner, had not Aveline scented danger. She was shy as a wild bird, and as hard to catch, in those days. She had never been so gentle to madam as now, nor so quiet and sisterly to Geysbert, but the impossibility of getting near her drove him almost frantic. Probity, too, found her attentive. She insisted on Probity's company whenever the same was practicable, and almost succeeded in making Geysbert hate his cousin.

Probity had not learned to approve of Aveline. Perhaps she could have found it in her heart to approve of her more had Geysbert approved of her less. But she

saw no good ground for censure, though she watched her with far-seeing eyes.

The crisis might have been yet further delayed if madam herself had not come to the rescue. She sent Aveline on a commission to a house some two miles off, and detailed Geysbert to see to her safety. And she expressly provided for the employment of Probity within doors on that clear December day. When the two returned, the crisis had come, and passed. Madam knew it by the nervous, half-penitent air with which Aveline passed Geysbert and ran up the steps, and by her eagerness to get away to her own room. She did not succeed in escaping. Madam called her into the big fire-lighted living room, and over to herself.

"You should have something to tell me, child," she said. "Is it not so?"

"Madam, I think not," replied Aveline, with a little flash of pride. "Geysbert had something to tell *me*, but we should both have been happier had it been left untold."

"Are you sure of that, child?"

"Quite sure, madam."

"There have been foolish maidens who have not known their own minds, and who have learned to mourn for that which their hand turned away," said madam. "You would do well to have a care lest you become one of their number."

Aveline made no answer.

"Hearts are not offered every day," continued the lady reproachfully.

Then Aveline's calmness gave way, and she fell on her knees by madam's side, and buried her face in her lap.

"Madam, I am sorry. But I could not take that which Geysbert offered, and I could not give that which he desired to take," she whispered. "Why does he not

see that — that — there is another who could give him what I — I have — ”

“Already bestowed. There, child, dry your eyes, and let your mind be at peace. I am satisfied. I ask not for my son Geysbert an empty heart. He himself will yet learn that it would be a poor gift.”

She put her hand tenderly on the girl's head.

“Be patient, my daughter,” she said. “It is a virtue more needed than any other, and never more needed than now.”

Madam sighed, and the firelight danced, and the minutes passed.

“There, child, go upstairs and take off those heavy wraps,” said madam at last, in a different tone, “and leave the troubles behind you. They'll right themselves none the better for fretting over them.”

CHAPTER XXV

THE sun, which on that December day shone on Aveline and Geysbert as they neared the manor house, was doing his best to dazzle the eyes of two men who paced the deck of a vessel headed for land. The coast of Long Island lay in the distance, and there was the bustle of preparation on board. Now and again the two men lifted their faces to the sharp December air, and one, the younger of the two, drew in the breath of it as if he could not have too much.

"I'm glad as a homesick child to be back again," he said. "Warmer climes are good enough in their way, but New Nederland for me, now and always."

The other laughed.

"You have not been away long enough to cure you of your provincial proclivities," he said. "Better continue the experience by returning with me."

"Not I. I stay in Yorke until the New Year, join in Christmas festivities, eat New Year's cookies, and such like, and then back to the manor house."

"You are the same plodding old Helmer you used to be when I spent those glorious boyish days with you and Geysbert," said the other. "Well, every man to his taste, but give me a life that has in it some spice of adventure."

"You have more than the spice here," replied Helmer gravely. "Do you intend in all soberness to run in this cargo to-night?"

"Do I intend? I should say I do," responded his friend gaily. "Have you any idea how many thousand pounds' worth of prohibited goods — good Dutch manufactures, all of them — are under your feet?"

"No, and don't want to have," replied Helmer. "Better take them back where they came from."

"You have no head for business, and no burning sense of injustice urging you forward," was the reply. "How is commerce to go on, I pray you, if Dutchmen may not deal in Holland, and every pound's worth of continental produce must first be landed in England, that the Englishman may secure his picking before our merchants so much as look at the goods? Taxes, and duties, and dues — a merchant hears of nothing else. We, who brave something worse than the fury of the seas, are righters of the public wrongs, martyrs to the cause of the people. Our countrymen need Dutch goods, and East India goods, and our merchants must have them at prices that will allow of their being bought by the honest men and women of the province. What would you have? He who supplies the public need is a public benefactor."

Helmer shook his head.

"There are many who think with you," he said, "and few who would be hard on your trade; but for myself, I would even rather pay the dues or go without the goods."

His friend laughed.

"You are straight-laced enough for a Puritan and Quaker combined," he said. "To-night we will convert you to our side. The man who can resist the soul-stirring excitement of running a cargo ashore is not of your age or build, I'll wager."

He walked briskly away. There were many orders to be given, and much preparation to be made before nightfall.

Helmer stood alone, looking towards the shore. His heart was light. In two more weeks the Dutch residents of New York would resort to their favourite pastime of firing guns on New Year's day. That was to

be the signal that Helmer's probation was ended. Then, if the river were open, he would go up the Hudson, and if not, he would follow an Indian trail, with a native for a guide, and in due time reach home — and Aveline.

It was of Aveline he was thinking when the sun shone in his eyes and made them misty. It was mainly because he could not bear to stay away one day longer than the prescribed time, that Helmer had shipped with an old friend, Marcellis Wendell, now engaged in the carrying trade between Surinam and New York.

The "Liberty" was a large vessel for the times. She carried onions, flaxseed, peas, and flour, and sometimes oysters and lobsters, from New York, and returned to that port in ballast. What she carried between the time when she left Surinam, and the time when she reached her anchorage at the port of New York, was another matter. The owners of certain warehouses in convenient situations upon the coast of Long Island were in the habit of looking out for the "Liberty," and so glad were they to welcome her, that many a dark night their boats danced over the waves to meet her, and greet her, and help lighten her. At a time when no European goods could be imported otherwise than through England, and when Dutch and fine East India manufactures were in special demand, it was little wonder that the "Liberty" found ways and means of carrying something more remunerative than ballast during the greater part of her homeward journey, though she sailed into the port of New York in all the innocence of a vessel guiltless of return cargo. Transfers of goods in the open sea, or upon some convenient island, were transactions not unheard of, and in any case the "Liberty" had to-day a full and valuable cargo, no part of which was destined to enter the port of New York.

The night was clear and moonless, and the wind fa-

vourable, and good-humour and joking prevailed aboard the "Liberty" as she bore down on the shore.

"We've a full night's work before us," said Marcelis, as he passed Helmer, "and another on top of that, unless we get more help than usual."

"You put out to sea before daylight?" asked Helmer.

"Surely. We must run out of the reach of danger. The loss of ship and cargo is an alternative that may well incite to caution."

It was only in accordance with human nature that the manifest risk in the undertaking should warm every sailor's blood, and set him to carrying out orders with a dash and promptitude not seen on ordinary occasions. Two boats were early loaded, in one of which Helmer took an oar. He was bent on seeing the development of this characteristic bit of trade.

"Bear away," commanded Marcelis. "There is no time to lose. Our friends will soon be coming to our aid, but it is not necessary to wait for them. Every moment is precious."

He himself stayed for the present on board, superintending the removal of the cargo. Every man was armed, and the boats kept well together. No word was spoken. Speech was an unnecessary hindrance. Presently a sound was heard in the distance.

"Yonder comes Jansen to the rescue," said one of the sailors. "The old man is slow to-night."

They rowed silently. The on-coming boat approached, and a voice was heard giving a command.

"That's not old Jansen's grunt," burst out one of the men.

"Silence!" whispered the mate, the suppressed growl putting every one on the alert.

The sound of oars came nearer, and a dark spot showed where the boat rode the waves.

"No friend that!" declared the mate under his breath, and at the same moment a figure arose in the advancing boat.

"In the name of the queen, stop where you are!"

For a moment Helmer listened to the voice, bewildered. Then —

"Myndert Hooghland!" he whispered. "'Tis the custom officer's boat."

"Aye, aye," responded the mate, in the same low tone. Then aloud: "The sea is wide; we dispute not your passing."

"Aye, but I dispute yours. Dip an oar at your peril!" shouted Myndert, as the boat drew near.

"Make ready for action!" commanded the mate, and the men's eyes gleamed in the darkness.

"What have you on board?" demanded the officer, or officer's assistant, for this was the position at present occupied by Myndert Hooghland.

"Two boat-loads of armed men. Have you aught to say against the importation of such?"

The boats were alongside now. Myndert ignored the question.

"You carry merchandise," he said, peering down into the nearest boat. "It is against the Laws of Trade to land any otherwhere than in the port of New York. In the name of the queen I declare your goods and your vessel, together with these boats, confiscated, and call upon you to surrender."

"You mistake. Our proceedings are regular — very regular," replied the mate sarcastically.

"Then why this night journey? Where are your cocquets?"

"Where are my cocquets? Here they are, my fine fellow. See if they suit you."

He gave the signal, and the sharp crack of guns sounded over the water. No one was wounded, for the

demonstration was but to show the strength of the expedition.

Myndert hesitated. He had hoped to meet but one boat at a time, and had trusted that the capture of the first boat would overawe the rest of the ship's crew. He had been sent here to watch the coast, and though in this case the attempt was foolhardy, he thought to do more than watch. He was ignorant of the name or rank of the vessel to which the boats belonged, and at first thought them to pertain to one of the shallops that plied in and out of the bays, and were helpful enough in running merchandise across to the mainland. The game he had tackled was too large for his strength. Therefore he hesitated.

"Made a little blunder, my friend, haven't you?" demanded the mate. "There's no harm done, however. We're friendly chaps enough. You've but to put yourselves under our protection, and we'll take good care of you, and though we may find it necessary to make blind men of you for a few hours, we will hurt not a hair of your heads. What say you?"

Myndert wavered, but at that moment there was a change of position, which gave him a better view of the mate's boat, and he caught a glimpse of a figure he had not before seen, a young man, tall and commanding.

"Helmer Feljer!" he ejaculated. "By all that's evil, I've got you now!"

He drew his sword and lurched forward. For the next few moments there was a clashing of weapons, and shouts enough to warn Marcelis that something was wrong.

The fight was short. It was over as suddenly as it began. When Myndert cried surrender there was but one of his crew that had not been disarmed, a big hulking negro who had escaped capture by keeping well behind his leader. Now, as Myndert held his sword

aloft, preparatory to passing it over to his captors, the black form crouched as if to hide itself from view. None was at liberty to note the gleam of hatred in the man's eyes, or the glitter of the teeth between his parted lips. The attitude was that of a wild beast crouched for a spring.

"All right. Sorry to have to appear anything but polite," said the mate, with something like a sneer, "but necessity knows no law. A rope there, some of you fellows. Free hands are dangerous."

Helmer stooped to disentangle a rope near his feet. It was caught under some of the merchandise.

"Cut it! Cut it!" commanded the mate. "We've no time to lose."

Helmer's knife was in his hand almost before the words were spoken. It was a big strong knife, and one the young man always carried. To draw the rope up preparatory to cutting it he leant over the side of the boat, the movement bringing him close to and almost behind Myndert, whose hands were in the mate's grasp. At that moment there was a surging movement, by what prompted nobody could explain. Myndert was pushed almost off his feet, and the mate's arm struck Helmer's hand, knocking the knife out of it into the other boat. With an angry exclamation Helmer leant further over to reach it, and then —

"Traitor! You've done for me!"

The words rose to a shriek, and effectually drowned a low murmur of sound, scarce articulate, accompanying the stab which buried Helmer's knife almost up to the handle in Myndert's back.

"There — pig — Dutchman! Cato not forget the flogging you get him. You not forget this."

There was a moment of complete confusion. Myndert shrieked and writhed with pain, tearing his hands free, and turning on Helmer. At the same moment the

negro pulled the knife out of the wound, and blood trickled down in the boat.

"You would stab me behind my back, would you, you murderer!"

The negro crouched low in the blood-spattered boat, his face livid with terror. It was not to him, however, that the words were addressed.

"I saw you, you fiend!" screamed Myndert, shaking his trembling fist at Helmer. "I saw you bend over to do it. You—you shall hang for this."

He staggered, and would have fallen, but by a great effort he steadied himself. Passion and excitement were lending a short respite from death.

"What do you mean?" demanded Helmer. "The knife was knocked out of my hand."

"You lie!" shouted Myndert, but his voice was failing. He made a mighty effort, and turned on the trembling negro, whose features worked convulsively.

"You saw him do it? You saw the fiend stab me?" he cried.

"Yes, yes. Me see."

The negro drew himself together. The muscles of his face ceased to work. He stood up and faced the company.

"He stoop so," he said, pointing to Helmer, "and then push so," and he imitated the action of stabbing. Myndert cast a look of intense hatred on Helmer.

"I have you now. You'll not escape me," he said, and fell fainting.

There was consternation among the sailors. None knew the truth of the story. The mate had seen Helmer stoop, and thought he had seen him recover the knife. He turned to him now.

"The best thing you can do is to get ashore as soon as possible, and make yourself scarce till this blows

over," he said in a low voice. "It has an ugly look, anyhow."

"It is a lie," cried Helmer hotly. "The knife was never in my hand from the moment I dropped it until it was torn from Myndert's back."

The mate shrugged his shoulders.

"There was nobody else to do it but the negro," he said, "and he was on the fellow's side. Take my advice and put a few miles between yourself and these parts before morning. If I make no mistake, the wounded man has not many hours to live. He was stabbed with your knife. It looks bad enough.

"We are all in a bad fix," he added, as he stepped back after taking the precautions he deemed necessary in connection with Myndert's crew. "We shall have to get our cargo ashore in double-quick time, and put out to sea for a week or two. Luckily none of these fellows know who we are."

He spoke in a low tone. Helmer looked at him blankly.

"Do you think I stabbed him?" he asked, in tones of concentrated horror.

"What else can I think? There was bad blood between you, as was shewn by his words. At any rate you owe it to us to keep out of the way. We've got to get out of this somehow."

"What will you do with him?" Helmer nodded towards Myndert.

"Bind up his wound as well as we can when we get to shore, and send him to the nearest dwelling, in charge of his own men, as soon as it is safe. But it'll be no use, mark my words. He's a dead man."

CHAPTER XXVI

“**Y**OU desire to speak with me?”

Madam Feljer entered the room where she usually gave audience to her tenants.

“Speak with you? Aye, but it would be something more than speech, if desire went for anything.”

Arent Hooghland came a step or two towards Madam Feljer, his hand clinched, and his face purple with passion.

She looked at him inquiringly.

“What is it you would say?” she asked quietly.

“What would I say? A curse on you, and a curse on the day I set foot on your land! Ruin take you and yours for a set of sneaking cowards, fit only to stab an honest lad in the back!”

Arent Hooghland’s voice was hoarse with rage. He shook his fist menacingly at Madam Feljer. If he thought his fury could daunt the little woman, or make her fear his great burly presence, he soon learned his mistake. She came closer to him.

“These are strong words, Arent Hooghland,” she said.

“Strong! Are they too strong for the occasion, think you? Would *your* words be weaker if one of my race should cruelly and sneakingly take the life of a son of yours? A fair fight I could abide, but to kill a man who has put himself at your mercy — it would take a Feljer to do that.”

“Arent Hooghland, what you have to say, say openly, and remember that you will be held responsible for your words.”

Madam's face had grown white, but her eyes were shining.

"I'll take the responsibility," said Arent savagely. "You'd call me to account in a court of justice, would you? You think you're hugely influential. But what think you I can do? I can *hang* a son of yours."

He lowered his head to bring his face close to Madam Feljer's as the last words were hurled from his lips. They came with a force of passion that caused her to recoil.

"Yes, and I'll do it."

"I have not the slightest doubt that you will, if you can — but can you?"

Madam spoke in Dutch, as did her visitor. Her voice shook a little, yet her eye was as firm as ever.

"Can I? Yes, I can, while there's law in the land. I can hang a Feljer high as a murderer, and force you to hide your accursed faces."

"If empty sound would do it, I doubt not it would soon be done," said madam. "But more than mere talk is needed to accomplish that of which you speak. Whom do you accuse, and of what?"

"Whom do I accuse?" shouted the enraged Dutchman. "Whom but that scoundrel of a son of yours, the villain who followed my boy at home and abroad, till he had a chance to do him to death in the very act of performing his duty to his country? Who but one would do such an act, and that one Helmer Feljer?"

Madam put out her hand, as if she would stop the outburst of words. The Dutchman noted the act.

"Aha! That's got you, old woman," he said brutally. "It's the first blow, and it's told. And now you may look out, for I swear I'll never stop till I've battered and bruised that old heart of yours as my woman's heart, yes, and my own heart too, has been battered by that murderous son of a Feljer."

"There are but two sons in the Feljer family. To which do your words apply?"

The clear young voice rang through the room. It was haughty and indignant. Arent turned at the sound.

"What have you to do with it, an upstart of a slave at best?" he said.

Aveline's eyes flashed, but she left the remark unanswered.

"If you would not have uncomfortable proof that madam is well protected from ruffianly attack in her own house, it might be as well to answer the questions that are put to you," she said.

"Answer? I can do that fast enough. You asked me who I called a murderer. It is Helmer Feljer. Now what do you make of that?"

"That it is either a wicked lie, or that your brain is crazed," said Aveline instantly. "There is nothing else that could be made of it."

"A lie, is it?" roared the man. "It's a lie that Helmer was aboard some vessel that headed on the sly for Long Island, and that he helped run a cargo ashore without paying the custom dues, I suppose? And it's a lie that my Myndert had got his eye on the rascals, aye, and come to close quarters with them? And it's a lie that he found them too much for him, and gave himself up into their hands, and then, when he was at their mercy, and trusted to their honour, he found out what the honour of a Feljer was worth? That's a lie, is it? But it's no lie that my boy is at death's door to-day, stabbed in the back by a cowardly thrust that the murderer daren't have attempted to his face. It's no lie that my woman is crying her heart out at the house, and that I am a childless man to-day, or as good as one, through the act of a Feljer. That's no lie, though you may refuse to believe it as you please."

"My good friend, your story may be correct, — in truth it seems to me that you believe it, — yet is the heat of your manner unjustifiable. You have need to seek the virtue of moderation. Wrong was never yet put down, nor right advanced, by the aid of an undisciplined temper."

Probity's voice was low and deep. It arrested the Dutchman, even in the moment of passion.

"Believe it?" he said, and this time he did not shout. "I believe it so thoroughly that I start in an hour for Yorke, in the hope of being in time to close my son's eyes, and to see to it that before he dies the murderer is denounced, and full proof of his guilt obtained. I go to bury my son, and hang his murderer."

"You have a sad duty to perform," said Probity, still in the same deep, full voice. "Yet it were well to see that justice be linked with mercy. The bed of death is a right appropriate spot for the practice of that forgiveness which every sinner needs."

"He showed no mercy, and he'll get no more than he gave," was the answer.

"It is easy to make assertions," broke in Aveline. "What proof have you that what you say is true?"

"Proof? The word of one who saw it done, and of Myndert himself. There came to me to-day a messenger from my son, bidding me come and avenge him. And I am going."

"Who saw it done?"

Aveline's tone was still incredulous. Her question was a challenge.

"A black slave belonging to Myndert's crew. He saw the coward lift the weapon, and it was he who pulled the cruel knife — Helmer Feljer's knife, mind you — from out the wound. *He* saw it done. And Myndert saw Helmer stoop as he made the lunge that

dug the knife well-nigh to my boy's heart. Oh, there's evidence enough to hang him, no fear!"

"Arent Hooghland, if what you say be true, then is the pride of the Feljers laid in the dust. Go you to Yorke. See your son, and — mine. Right will be done, I doubt not, but until it be proved, I refuse to credit your story."

Madam's voice was hard and strained. She showed, however, no sign of flinching. She bestowed on the Dutchman one long, searching look, and turned to leave the room. In a moment Aveline was at her side.

"It is a cruel falsehood, madam," she said, in a low tone. "He could not do it."

"I trust you are right, my child, but — he has grown strangely passionate of late."

Madam traversed the narrow passage into which the door opened, and walked towards the staircase. It was noticeable that in this hour of fear and doubt she did not turn to Geysbert. He was not far away, but she did not ask for him. Some instinct of the heart warned her that he too would think there might be truth in the accusation.

"I may come in?"

Aveline spoke pleadingly.

"Yes. You — have faith in him."

"Madam, I *know* him. If the deed were done, 'twas not of craft or malice, but of self-defence or necessity. Why, madam, his hand could no more strike a cruel blow than could your own."

Madam uttered no word, but she drew the girl's head down and kissed her.

"Truly the beginning of strife is like the letting out of water. I fear that my poor cousin was ever wilful and passionate."

Probity stood by Geysbert's side, with her hand laid affectionately on his arm. She had been talking with

him of the charge against Helmer. When her aunt left the Dutchman to go or stay as he chose, she remained behind.

"For my aunt's sake and for yours," she told her cousin, "I felt that I must do what I could. Poor Aunt Wyntie was in no fit state to question this unfortunate father. Therefore, I attempted, as far as in me lay, to perform the duty for her. I learned that there was much resistance to the efforts of the officials to seize some goods being brought ashore on Long Island, and that the boats' crews were too well armed for the representatives of the law, at the head of whom was this good man's son. Finding himself overpowered, and seeing no use in holding out further, Myndert Hooghland yielded to superior numbers, and gave himself up. It was then, when a prisoner, and one who had laid down his arms, that Helmer drew a knife and stabbed the poor man almost to the heart. Truly it is a sad story, and yet—I fear me the heart of my cousin is sorely prone to be influenced by passion. I would fain believe him guiltless, but I fear—I fear."

"Aye, and so do I."

Geysbert was looking moodily in front of him. He did not need the information Probité had imparted. He had already visited Hooghland's dwelling, and personally interrogated the messenger who brought the news. He had met the Dutchman when he left the house, and heard the story from his lips. Hooghland was not bitter against Geysbert—except for being a Feljer. He could talk to him more calmly. And Geysbert had not exasperated him by throwing doubt on his story.

Hooghland did not quite know what to make of Geysbert. He seemed shocked, almost stunned, but he made no violent effort to confute the evidence. The Dutchman did not understand it. Not that this was to be wondered at. Geysbert did not understand himself. There was

a strange commotion going on within. He was shocked, unnerved by the charge, but he found within himself no overpowering impulse to deny it. The horror and disgrace touched him strongly, but beneath was a feeling he did not stop to analyze. Thoughts of Aveline, and of the possible consequences of this disclosure, intruded themselves. He was powerfully affected, but the story had not struck home to his heart as it had done to the heart of Madam Feljer.

"Alas, that my aunt should have one sorrow close on the heels of another."

Geysbert started. He had not been thinking of his mother.

"Poor mother. It is hard on her," he said, and he said it uneasily.

"Yes. Affliction is laying its hand heavily upon her, and her heart is bowed with sorrow. I will go again and seek to comfort her, but first I thought it best to see you, that I might impart to you the knowledge I had gained. What think you it will be best to do? My cousin Geysbert will, I am sure, be no laggard in doing all that is right."

"No. I intend to waste no time," said Geysbert. "I shall start for New York before night. Then I must be guided by circumstances, but I think — if the accusation be true — that flight alone will save Helmer. He was yet at liberty when the messenger started."

"Then you have seen this Hooghland?"

Probity looked a little crestfallen. Her information was but stale news after all.

"Yes, and his informant also. I have lost no moment of time. I must see my mother, and then away."

Geysbert's mind was in a whirl. He felt as if action alone were bearable. He mounted the stairs two steps at a time.

"Have you heard?"

Madam asked it eagerly. She was looking for some sign of hope.

"Yes. I am going to Yorke,"

"And you think —"

"I don't know what to think."

"He did not do it. Helmer is not capable of meanness."

Her voice was appealing.

"No. And yet — he has of late shown himself in a new light. No, it does not seem as if Helmer could do a dastardly deed; but a violent deed — I am not sure."

Geysbert spoke hesitatingly. In a great measure he was speaking according to his convictions. His relations with Helmer had not of late brought out the softer side of his brother's nature, and possibly Geysbert's eyes had not been as keen to discern the good as to pick out the evil. In those first moments he felt rather strongly convinced of Helmer's guilt, but if he had known how much the conviction depended on the antagonism between himself and Helmer, he might have been startled.

"How soon will you start?"

"In half an hour."

"Very well. I shall be ready."

"You?"

"Certainly. Helmer must have the counsel of one who is not prejudiced against him."

"But, mother, it is impossible. Everything depends on a hasty journey. I shall take a canoe. Your presence would hinder materially. I shall let no risk stop me from pushing on day and night. With you I dare not hurry thus. Helmer's life may depend on my being in time. Surely it is foolishness to risk it."

Madam Feljer wavered. There was wisdom in Geysbert's words.

"You will do all that can be done," she said, "as if — as if you believed in him thoroughly?"

"I will do everything possible, as much as you could do yourself."

"And as soon as you reach the city, and have seen — my boy Helmer — you will dispatch a messenger? Then, if there be need, I can come."

"I will," said Geysbert.

He stooped to kiss her, and then hurried away.

Madam herself prepared all that was necessary for the journey. She was very quiet, but she grudged every moment that passed.

"Spare nothing, neither yourself nor your money," she said. "It is for your brother."

"You may trust me," replied Geysbert, and he kissed her again and was gone.

CHAPTER XXVII

“**T**HEY don't know him, Kip, — not one of them — only you — and me.”

Aveline buried her face in the dog's rough coat, and put her arms about his neck. Out here, in the shelter of the leafless trees, there was no one to see. Even the sun was not looking. He had drawn a curtain of cloud between himself and the girl kneeling on the frozen ground to caress the dog — Helmer's dog, and the only one in the family, beside herself, that had no doubt of Helmer's honour.

“Even madam cannot trust him. She says he is passionate, and might have been driven on before he realized what he was doing. As if he *could* be either mean or cruel! *You* know, don't you, Kip?”

There was a catch in her voice. Kip heard it, and wriggled himself free until his great wistful eyes could look into hers. Then he gave vent to a low whine. Something was wrong. This girl, to whom Kip had surrendered all that was left of his heart when Helmer's share was taken out of it, — this girl whom Helmer himself had bidden the dog serve, — was in trouble. Kip knew it by that catch in her voice, and the sorrowful droop of her lips. He whined again. He must needs say something to comfort her. The effort after expression gave movement to every joint of his body. Kip was talking all over, from the tip of his restless tail to the big mournful eyes, and the red tongue that touched Aveline's face lovingly.

“Oh, Kip, Kip, they hate him so!”

Kip's frame shook with his efforts to respond, and his eyes grew deeper with sympathy.

"And that dreadful man said — oh, Kip, they — they daren't — hang him!"

It had found voice now, the fear which Aveline had hidden even from herself, ever since Arent Hooghland uttered his horrible threat. It was only a whisper, almost too low for Kip's sharp ears, for it seemed to Aveline that to say it was to give it reality. Now, at the whispered word, she broke down, and a passion of sobs overpowered her. She buried her face again in Kip's shaggy coat, and the dog stood trembling with sympathy, uttering now and again a low plaintive whine. The sorrow was becoming too deep for expression. His great honest heart was heaving with his desire to comfort this girl — his mistress. Kip knew she was his mistress, for Helmer had told him so, that day — so long ago that to the dog it seemed a lifetime — when his master turned the big loving head towards his own face, and bade him go to her, and obey her, while he, Helmer, was away. It was not expected that Kip would comprehend every word of that half-whispered farewell, some of which was addressed to himself, and some to this girl, whose face was buried in his coat. Possibly he was not meant to comprehend.

"Will you let him be yours while I am gone?" Helmer had said. "I should not like to feel that his loyal, affectionate heart would be starved for three whole months — however his master's heart may fare. Kip is nothing but a follower," he had added with a laugh. "It is part of his nature to be one with me. Where his master loves, Kip adores, and — he long ago gave his heart into your keeping."

There certainly was a resemblance between Kip and his master at the moment when Helmer said that. Both were trying to say more with their eyes than they could put into words. And they both succeeded.

"She ought to know him better, Kip, she ought, and she — his mother!"

The whine increased to a short yelp.

"Hush, doggie! We don't want to be found. We are not going to cry — not at any other time. It would be like saying he — did it."

And then the tears trickled into the shaggy hair, and the sobs came faster again.

It was a whole day since Geysbert started for New York, and a silent horror hung over the manor house. Madam had shut herself in her room, admitting even Probity and Aveline but seldom. The very slaves felt that trouble brooded over the house, and they moved about with wide solemn eyes, and portentous shakes of the head.

The general solemnity exasperated Aveline. She could not believe, she *would* not believe, that there was any necessity for it. The story was all a wicked fabrication of Myndert Hooghland's, and would explode as soon as it was investigated. It was a cruel injustice to Helmer to deem it even possible that he could commit murder in cold blood. Aveline could have excused strangers for crediting it, though that was preposterous enough, but that madam should waver, and admit the possibility, was beyond her comprehension. How could madam help knowing that the accusation was false? Though all the world should assert its truth, Aveline would not waver.

"Dear child, you have yet to learn that the heart is an unsafe guide, and that its evidence is to be accepted with misgivings," Probity had said gravely, when some such thought found voice.

And Aveline had replied that in her opinion there was less danger in listening to the testimony of a warm heart than in following the guidance of a cold head, that

saw enough faults, and missed enough virtues, in one day, to stamp it a faithless counsellor.

Ryseck Schredel was the only sensible person about the place — in Aveline's estimation.

"Myndert Hooghland says Helmer's killed him, does he?" she asked, with a sniff, and she snapped her fingers defiantly. "That for what Myndert Hooghland says! I wouldn't believe the rascal if he up and told me when he was dead and buried, let alone listening to him on what he chooses to declare is his death-bed. Death-bed! Not it. It's not the first time an angel has come into too close contact with the devil, and the devil has cried 'Murder!' but when the hullabaloo is over, it's never the devil that is dead. You can't kill that sort. I doubt the lad is too much a chip of that block to be kicked out of this world easy. Old Arent Hooghland needn't go wailing round bemoaning his childlessness. He'll find he's in no such luck as that yet, or I've lost my mark."

Thoughts not altogether opposed to Ryseck's view of the case passed through Geysbert's mind as he pushed his canoe through the waters of the Hudson. It was fortunate for his purpose that the winter was unduly late, for it was no ordinary thing to be able to reach New York by water at this season — not a week before Christmas.

The mode of travel gave abundant opportunity for thought. Geysbert had hardly thought at all since Arent Hooghland made his accusation. His brain had been in a whirl, and intense excitement had found vent in action. The excitement was not diminished, but the action was now little more than mechanical. In such a position thought crowded in upon him, and all the possibilities of this crisis presented themselves in review — arrest, trial, perhaps death, for Helmer, and disgrace for the name of Feljer. Geysbert was a proud man,

and the prospect of being the talk of the province made him set his teeth together savagely. Why could not Helmer keep out of mischief, or if he must needs go in for adventure, why should he so far lose control of himself as to attack Myndert personally?

Geysbert's anger was hot against his younger brother. Was there no end to the loss he must suffer through Helmer? A few days ago he had been called upon to give up the desire which had been gaining strength from the moment when he stepped aboard the "Bullfinch," and saw the sweet sorrowful face that had never yet departed from his dreams. Now his good name was to follow, unless, as perchance might prove to be the case, Arent had magnified the danger, and he should find Myndert less seriously injured than he had been led to expect. It was possible, too, that there might be another version of the story, a version in which the positions would be reversed, and Myndert instead of Helmer be proved to have been the aggressor. Almost without will of his own Geysbert contrasted the two, Myndert, the accuser, and Helmer. Myndert he knew well, and Helmer better, and in view of his knowledge of the two characters some such thought as Ryseck had expressed entered his mind, and he acknowledged the charge to be a strange one.

When his thought turned thus to his brother, it was always to the boy Helmer, the young brother whom he had protected and loved in the days when there was no rivalry between them. That this Helmer could be guilty of baseness, of deliberate treachery and cruelty, was impossible. The old affection struggled to the front, fought to push aside the new bitterness, to sweep away resentment and ill-will. It would surely have succeeded, but between the memory of his brother and his own softening heart came the face of a girl, and as often as it came affection was worsted, and the hard grudge

returned. Helmer was his rival, and would succeed where he had failed, would win the good he himself coveted. It was for him only a question of time, unless — well, there were many contingencies just now.

Geysbert did not seek to persuade himself that Helmer's suit would end as unsatisfactorily as his own. His failure proved some antecedent success. Aveline must care for Helmer, because she had declined to care for him. She had been very determined, very definite in her refusal to listen to his plea, and he had accepted her decision as final, for would not Helmer soon be back to try his luck? But now, with Helmer out of the field —

Ah, but was Helmer out of the field? He was going to New York to vindicate his brother, to prove Mynert a liar, and make it possible for Helmer to return and wed Aveline. Aye, was he? Something of this he had been proposing, or his heart had been proposing; but what of the consequences? Could he bear to see Aveline Helmer's bride, and know that his own hand had given his rival the prize? He uttered an impatient exclamation, and urged his boat the faster. This journey was interminable, and thought — thought was maddening, and worse than useless. Where was the sense in thinking? He did not know yet whether Helmer might not be guilty of the charge brought against him. He could but wait and see, leave the question open, and be ready to weigh the evidence when any presented itself.

Thus it happened that when Geysbert reached New York he was in a receptive mood; that is, he was open to charges against his brother. Bit by bit jealousy had been triumphing over love, and though he was thoroughly prepared to defend his brother should he find him guiltless, and to aid in his escape if he should indeed be guilty, none of the softer feelings were to the

fore when he paid his first visit to Myndert, for the purpose of learning as much as possible of the encounter.

He experienced a distinct shock when he stepped into the room where Myndert lay. After that first glance he did not attempt to deny that murder had been committed. Was it Helmer's hand that had dealt the fatal blow?

The wounded man roused himself at Geysbert's entrance. His hollow shining eyes looked into the face of his former friend.

"I was as full of life as you a week ago," he said, in a fierce, weak voice. "Now look at me. Dying! And through him!"

It was his only greeting.

"Nay, but you will get better," said Geysbert, fascinated by the hatred in those gleaming eyes.

"You know better, Geysbert Feljer. And I know better. I'm a dying man. The blow was aimed to kill, and it has not failed of its work. Dying! Aye, but by all that's holy I swear I'll not die till I've set in motion that which shall hang him for the murderer he is."

Geysbert recoiled from the exceeding rancour of the speaker. His eyes shone as if they were the outlets for the fire of hatred burning within. He put forth his hand and clutched that of Geysbert.

"What have you come for?" he asked suspiciously. "To cheat me of my revenge? A curse on you if you defraud justice of her right, and me of the joy of knowing he will hang!"

The hand which clasped Geysbert's seemed to scorch through the cool healthy flesh. It held him with the nervous grip of weakness.

"Where is he?" asked Myndert, his hold tightening. "Are you hiding him up there till I am dead and buried?"

"Hiding him? No. I know nothing of my brother,

or of this — accident," replied Geysbert. "I came to hear from you all that you could tell me."

"And for what purpose? To thwart me in the end, and snatch that dastardly wretch, that murderous villain, from the punishment he deserves? Aha! You'll not do it. I shall die easy yet."

His hold relaxed, and he lay exhausted, passion yet quivering in the nerves of the death-like face. It took time and much patience to draw from him the particulars of the night encounter, and the sudden stabbing. Again and again his anger blazed up, and he raved until exhaustion put a stop to his invectives.

His passion reacted on Geysbert. He had been waiting for some influence to confirm his mind's attitude towards his brother. He had thought to keep himself impartially from judgment, and in truth he had decided before ever he set foot in New York. Professing to hold the balance even, he had allowed the memory of a girl's face to turn the scale. Now he was unconsciously looking for confirmation of his decision, and he found it. In the shattered life before him he saw Helmer's handiwork. He was ready to see it so, and since the will has much to do with the judgment, it was not long before Geysbert's judgment was convinced, and his heart hardened against Helmer.

There were not many additional facts to be learned from Myndert. Of the vessel to which the boats belonged he could tell nothing. No suspicious bark had come into port, and in the darkness and the confusion of the fray he had recognized none of the crew. When he recovered consciousness he found himself in a place of safety, whither he had been carried by his own men.

Neither then nor since had there been any trace of Helmer.

"Let him hide," said Myndert vindictively. "Let

him lead the life of a rat in a hole. He cannot hide forever. There'll be a day when he'll come out of his burrow, and as soon as he shows his head he's a dead man."

Geysbert had no better success with the negro. He interrogated him closely, but could not make him swerve from his statement. There was no trace of guilt in the manner in which he described the fight, and its tragical ending. Geysbert could find no flaw in his evidence. Things looked black for Helmer. His absence spoke strongly for the truth of the accusation. To Geysbert there seemed little reason to doubt that his hand had guided the knife.

On the whole, Geysbert was relieved that he found no trace of his brother. Since he was guilty, the best thing that could happen would be his complete disappearance. Geysbert had his own opinion as to the mode of that disappearance, and in accordance with that opinion he covertly watched all in-coming vessels. Not that he expected to see Helmer on any one of them. It was only a fear lest his brother should return that kept him in the city. He wanted to warn him, if such should be the case. He was convinced that Helmer was guilty, but he was none the less resolved to spare him the punishment of his crime — up to a certain point. But Helmer must keep away. His own life depended on it. Yes, and there was something else that depended on it too. Once again came the thought of Aveline, and now there was with it a distinct feeling of triumph. The prize was not Helmer's — never would be Helmer's now.

A smile hovered about his lips when he thought of the light in which his report would place Helmer, and of how the news would be looked upon by Aveline. That smile was not a pleasant one. It did not soften, even at memory of Aveline. Why should it? She had preferred Helmer to himself, now she would have the

opportunity of seeing the folly of her choice. He would spare her none of the pain—it would be better that she should feel it all. The sharper the pang, the more wholesome the discipline. But when it had done its work, when she had suffered sufficiently, he would comfort her, and teach her to love again, more wisely than before.

It was with this thought in his mind that he wrote and sent off the letter he had promised to dispatch to his mother. He spared no detail that might convince his readers of Helmer's guilt. He pictured Myndert's dying condition, and gave the slave's testimony. And, consciously or unconsciously, he put into every word the colour of his own feeling. When that special dispatch reached her hand, madam shut herself in her own room. Geysbert had meant that the bitterness of that letter should eat into a woman's heart, and it did—but it was the heart of an old woman, and the corrosion went deep. Old hearts sometimes grow frail beneath the troubles of life, and possibly madam's heart was not as tough as her elder son believed.

Geysbert did not hasten his return. He stayed to watch events, and possibly to allow his letter to work. The more he thought of Aveline, and of all he would say to her, the more he elaborated the case, and sought in his own mind to meet the objections she would be sure to raise, the stronger he became in his position. He had at first simply accepted the guilt of his brother, allowed his opinion on that point to become settled; now he had gone further, and assumed the function of prosecuting attorney. He was personally interested in working up the case. He grew hot on the side of justice.

When he left New York, Myndert was still alive. It seemed as if his hatred of Helmer prevented his death. His wound had not healed, and he was slowly sinking, but he held on to life with wonderful tenacity.

"He'll not escape me," he said to Geysbert, by way of farewell.

The young man did not return by the way he had come. Winter had swooped down on the province, and the Hudson was frozen. By the route that Helmer had expected to take, and only slightly later than the time when Helmer should have returned, he made his way homeward.

It was when less than a day's journey from the manor house, and after he had discharged his Indian guide, that he halted to satisfy his hunger. Behind a tree, not more than a stone's throw away, a silent-footed traveller halted too. From tree to tree that figure had followed Geysbert for hours. Now, as the young man threw himself down to rest, the Indian stepped out into the trail. Geysbert looked up in some surprise, but in no alarm, for the Indians of the neighbourhood were all friendly. The stranger advanced.

"You are he they call Geysbert, son of the good white brother of the house on the hill," he said in Dutch.

"Yes. What do you want with me?" asked Geysbert.

"I bring this from the hand of the young white brother. He say, let it speak of him, and when it has spoken, drop it into the fire that brothers burn as we burn our fires of friendship. Let it go to ashes. Ashes have no tongues."

Geysbert started, and changed colour.

"Where is the white brother?" he asked.

The Indian turned slightly, and with a sweep of his hand indicated the whole broad land.

"Where is the deer that fed here yesterday, or the wolf that passed last night? Under the great sun, and above the hard earth. He is there."

He looked fixedly at Geysbert for a minute, saw him untie the packet, and departed as silently as he had come.

For fully half an hour Geysbert sat with the paper in his hand, his eyes bent on the closely written lines. Hunger was forgotten. In that half-hour he had the opportunity to remodel his opinions. He heard the story of the night encounter from the other side. Helmer kept nothing back. He told all the facts, reserving only the name of the vessel in which he sailed. He announced his intention of keeping in hiding for a time, in the hope that Myndert would recover, and promised to communicate, if possible, with his family. He begged Geysbert to watch the issues closely, and when his messengers came to let him know how things stood. And he sent a loving message to his mother, and to Aveline and Probita. He did not spend much time in protesting his innocence. He simply asserted it, having no doubt that his assertion would be believed. In the end he advised the burning of the letter as soon as it had been read at home, or before, if necessary.

Geysbert read from end to end of the epistle, and then turned back and read again. His face did not soften. His lips were pressed tightly together. For the third time he read. Then his lips opened.

"It is a lie," he said; "cleverly constructed, truly, but a lie."

And then he carried out the Indian's directions. He gathered together a few dry sticks and kindled a fire. Then in the midst of "the fire of friendship such as brothers burn" ? he dropped the packet, and watched it go to ashes. The light sticks blazed themselves out, and the embers grew cold and dead. Geysbert knocked them apart, and pursued his journey. He reached the manor house before nightfall.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"MISSY AV'LINE!"

MTyte's voice was sunk to a mysterious whisper. He lifted a woolly head just high enough from behind a snow-bank to disclose a pair of eyes. Aveline started violently, and gave a little gasp.

"What are you doing, hiding behind there?" she asked sharply.

She was angry with herself for being startled. She was getting uncomfortably nervous in these days.

"Missy Av'line," whispered Tyte again, still in that mysteriously low tone, "I got someting 'portant to tell, but" — and here Tyte's voice sank until the sound fairly stuck in his throat — "Mars'r Geysbert better not see me tell it."

"What is it?" asked Aveline, still somewhat impatiently.

"Someting 'bout — Mars'r Helmer."

Aveline's face grew white. Tyte dropped down behind his snow-bank.

"Dere's Mars'r Geysbert," he whispered, and lay perfectly still.

Aveline was wise enough not to turn her head. She continued her walk towards the slaves' quarters. When she reached them she stopped, gave some directions to the first negro woman she met, and ended by instructing her to send Tyte to the house when he was next seen. She had something for him to do.

"Just so, missy," was the answer, in Dutch. "And how goes it with madam? Ah, it's sore times we've had since the good master was taken."

"Madam is feeling better, I think," replied Aveline kindly. "The orders I bring came from herself."

"Bless you, missy, that's good news," replied the woman heartily.

The slaves at the manor house were all old servants, and had watched the growing up of the young people alongside that of their own progeny. To them the house was desolate, now that the old master was gone, and one son away, nobody knew where. Madam seemed their only stay, and from the day when a certain messenger arrived from New York bearing to her a sealed packet, madam had perceptibly failed.

The presence of Aveline and Probity was a necessity now, for the care of the household had fallen almost entirely upon them. Aveline's days had become a continual conflict between loving tenderness and impatient resistance. The silent sorrow that looked out of madam's eyes made the girl feel a constant impulse to caress her, to coax the old light back, but the deepening lines about her mouth, the close pressure of the lips, that said as plainly as words could have done that madam's heart was cold as well as sore, awakened all the antagonism in her. She wanted to hurl defiance at those set lips, and the judgment they embodied. Between the conflicting emotions she hovered about madam, sometimes exhibiting flashes of temper which madam was at no loss to interpret, but more often allowing the pitying love to master the upspringing opposition, and show itself in tender care that made madam depend upon her more than ever.

Geysbert had not found his plan work quite as he had expected. He had none of those arguments with Aveline for which he had prepared himself while yet in New York. When he first spoke of his brother, she fixed her eyes inquiringly upon him, and listened, now and then throwing out a question that broke the thread

of his recital, or uttering a word or two of comment, always at a point where there was a flaw in the argument, or where he had unconsciously betrayed his own lack of earnestness in his brother's cause. But when he had told all, she had nothing to say. It was Probity who spoke pitying words of Helmer, and counselled charity.

"Alas, the heart of man is sadly deceitful," she said. "It surely becomes us to be pitiful towards the sinner. My poor cousin has but followed the guidance of an unregenerate heart, and now, I doubt not, he is finding that the way of transgressors is hard."

"To which of your cousins do you refer?" asked Aveline, with a heightened colour on her cheeks.

Probity turned a calm, surprised gaze upon her.

"My dear child, what does your question mean?" she asked.

"Nothing, to you," replied Aveline, looking past Probity to Geysbert.

He uttered an exclamation that was not polite, and departed hastily.

As time passed, he had none of those quiet talks with Aveline to which he had looked forward. If he had inflicted wounds upon her heart, he was not called upon to bind them up.

"You may believe what you like," she said, "understand me — what you *like* — about Helmer. You have found out nothing that necessarily criminales him. You have simply listened to his enemies. To one who knows him your words are empty. You do not know him — nor yourself."

The last two words were uttered very distinctly, and made Geysbert bite his lip, and look at her as if he would have liked to do something more than look.

There was only one person before whom Aveline quailed, and that was Arent Hoogland. One part of

his mission had been accomplished before he left New York. He had buried his son Myndert. The other part, the thought of which made Aveline's heart beat with fear every time she encountered him, he was yet watching and waiting to fulfil.

"I've come back to keep guard over the Feljers till I've hunted one of them to the ground," he announced, when he returned to his farm.

Aveline never saw him without a cold horror stealing into her heart. It was the thought of him that turned her cheek pale when Tyte spoke of Helmer. What did the boy know? Was Helmer near, and in danger?

She hastened homeward, avoiding the bank where Tyte might yet be in hiding. Not ten minutes after she had entered, a negro came to summon her.

"That Tyte say you want him, missy."

"Yes, I left word for him to come. I want him to fetch something for me. Send him up here."

Aveline disappeared in her own room as she spoke, and waited until the solemn face of Tyte appeared at the door.

"Come in, Tyte. I want you to go to the barn with a message for me," she said.

Tyte came in cautiously, the importance of the news he had to communicate proving almost too much for the steadiness of his legs.

"Shut the door, and come over here."

Tyte obeyed.

"Now!"

"Missy Av'line, *he's* never disappeared same as dey say. He write letters to Mars'r Geysbert, and Mars'r Geysbert write to him."

Aveline stared at him.

"How do you know?" she asked at last.

"Big Injun bring de letter, and tell Mars'r Geysbert

he want to know why dere no more letter dan one last time he send."

"How do you know this, boy?"

Aveline's hand grasped Tyte's shoulder. Tyte fairly trembled with eagerness and importance. His eyes grew bigger than ever.

"Dis boy out in de forest," he said slowly, "'way out. Den dis boy see Mars'r Geysbert comin' and hide."

"What for?" interposed Aveline.

"Mars'r Geysbert kick dis boy once for bein' out dere. Want no more kicks."

"Well? What then?"

The hand that pressed Tyte's shoulder was not very steady.

"Den Mars'r Geysbert whistle, low and soft like, and de forest all still as night, and dere never a sound."

Tyte stopped impressively.

"Yes?"

"And he whistle again. Den out in de forest, long way off, someting else whistle, and Mars'r Geysbert he stan' still and wait. Den no sound at all till big Injun come out from behind a tree, right 'fore Mars'r Geysbert, and stan' and look at him, and Mars'r Geysbert look at *him*."

Aveline's hold tightened. The boy felt it, and his eyes rolled in response.

"Injun take out packet, and give Mars'r Geysbert," he continued, "and say — 'De white broder say only one packet 'stead of two, last time; he 'spect two, and say I lose one.' Den Mars'r Geysbert swear, and tell him to hold his tongue, and carry what he get."

"Tyte, are you sure you heard all this? You are speaking the truth?"

Aveline's voice trembled as she asked the question.

"Missy, I sure enough," replied Tyte solemnly. "I close to Mars'r Geysbert in a big hole behind de snow."

"Go on then. What did Geysbert do?"

Unconsciously she dropped the "Mr.," forgetting to whom she was speaking.

"Mars'r Geysbert open de packet and look, and den say — 'To-night, when de moon is down,' and de Injun turn and lose him in de forest."

Tyte paused, his face upturned to Aveline's, and his eyes staring into hers. She stood over him, waiting almost breathlessly.

"What then?" she asked.

"Den Mars'r Geysbert read, and he swear again and say — 'Your anxious broder Helmer! I vow, by all you hold dear, you no broder of mine.'"

Aveline's face was pale, but her eyes flashed.

"Is that all?" she said.

"Yes, missy."

Tyte was awed by the effect of his words. The girl's hand still grasped his shoulder. There was a long silence. When she spoke, it was in a low, impressive voice.

"Tyte, do you love Mr. Helmer?" she asked.

"Missy, I *does*."

"Then, boy, never let a word of this come out of your mouth again. Better bite your tongue out than tell to any one else what you have told me."

"Dis boy tink missy want to know." Tyte's tone was crestfallen. It aroused Aveline.

"Tyte," she said, "you have done Mr. Helmer a kindness to-day that he will never forget. But you do not know the danger. Tyte, his *life* depends on keeping quiet."

"Dis boy never talk," said Tyte.

"Not to any one?"

"Not to nobody. He bite his tongue out first, as missy say."

"Very well. I trust you, Tyte. Remember, you and I have a secret we must never tell. And we must not even let any one know we have a secret. Go away and

forget it. And Tyte! Don't go into the forest again. Mr. Geysbert might see you next time."

Tyte's face fell.

"It is for Mr. Helmer I ask," said Aveline gently.

"Dis boy won't go no more."

"Thank you. You are Mr. Helmer's own boy."

He beamed on her.

"Now tell me exactly where you saw the big Indian."

When Tyte walked slowly away to the barn he was too full of importance to caper.

"Mars'r Helmer's boy! Course I am," he said to himself, but he pressed his lips together, that no sound should escape.

"Geysbert, does madam's face never reproach you that you have taken no further steps to bring her news of her younger son?"

Aveline had met Geysbert in the hall, just where the light fell best on his face. She stood and studied it as she spoke. He changed colour perceptibly.

"You are unjust," he said. "You have ever been that to me."

"Am I?"

He looked at her for a moment. Then he caught her arm.

"Aye, you are," he said. "You are the last to hold out. My mother believes me, but you —"

"Yes, she believes you — more's the pity."

He released her quickly, flinging her arm from him. She did not move.

"Have you never learned aught else of him?" she asked.

He looked at her sharply.

"I have never left the manor house. My duty was here," he said.

"True," she answered, and then moved aside, and let him pass. He went away with a scowl on his face.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE moon was not down, nor would be for an hour. The wind, sweeping through the bare branches of the trees, was responsible for the bewildering commotion among the shadows of the forest. Yet it was not to be credited with all the movement. There was a shadow that advanced independently, starting from the outermost rim of the forest, and moving inward till it fell over a hole left by an uprooted tree. The root of the tree yet lay upheaved towards the track by which the solid body pertaining to the shadow had penetrated, and against it was piled a sheltering bank of snow. It was white, unsullied snow, frozen hard enough to bear the light figure that stepped cautiously upon it. There were prints in which the intruder might set foot, the marks of Tyte's blundering feet when he darted from the track to hide from "Mars'r Geysbert." Aveline looked at them, nodded decisively, and trusted herself to their guidance. They landed her in a spot well out of sight of the path by which she had come, and by which, in all probability, Geysbert would come.

Even the trained eye of an Indian might be excused if it missed the figure that was white as the covering of the forest in winter, and that sank into the snow depths and waited motionless. Lying there in the snow Aveline seemed part of it, for not even her head was an exception to the general whiteness she had assumed. She wanted to be free to listen and plan without fear of detection.

Her heart was in a tumult, though it is fair to say that anger was the predominating feeling. The thought

of madam's stricken face, and Helmer's weary waiting for letters that never came, made the anger fairly blaze. She would have liked to confront Geysbert with his deceit, but such a proceeding was not safe. Helmer's life was in danger, and until she knew just how far that life was in Geysbert's power she must move cautiously. That Madam Feljer's elder son was capable of treachery she had long believed. That he was guilty of treachery she had sometimes suspected, but of the extent of the treachery she had not dreamed. Now, justly or unjustly, she classed him and Arent Hooghland together.

The moon descended slowly, and the wind rattled the branches overhead. Aveline shivered and cowered lower. It was lonely and desolate here in the forest. She was oppressed with a feeling of the bare coldness of the world. Somewhere in that cold world Helmer was a wanderer, and at home, in the warmth of the manor house, the chill yet penetrated to madam's heart.

The minutes were very long, and the stillness was calculated to work havoc with a watcher's nerves. There may have been stealthy wild creatures creeping over the snow about her, but Aveline did not hear them. It seemed to her that she and the wind were alone. So perfect was the stillness that when, without warning, there came a light touch on her head, she started up with a low cry. A dark face was above her, and eyes, searching and inscrutable, looked down at her.

"What is the sister of the snow seeking in the forest at night?" said the Indian, in a deep voice, his tongue giving her the name her appearance suggested.

"The shelter of the white snow," she replied truthfully.

He looked at her and grunted. Aveline's startled eyes were fixed upon him, as if fascinated. Was this the Indian for whom she was waiting?

"The shelter of the snow is cold," he said.

"But the spirit of the sister of the snow is warm," she answered, "warmer in the forest than under the white man's roof, for somewhere, where the snow lies unbroken, is the white brother whose thought is of her, and of the packet she would send to him if the wings of the wind knew whither to carry it."

She looked at him as closely as the uncertain light would permit. His face appeared unchanged.

"From whence comes the sister of the snow?" he asked.

"From the Feljer manor house, upon the hill."

He grunted again.

"Does the white brother desire the packet?" he asked.

"Yes. He has waited for it long."

The Indian held out his hand.

"It shall talk to him of the sister waiting in the snow," he said.

"Stop!" said Aveline quickly. "None save the white brother himself must know that it is sent. Only the sister of the snow, and the white brother, and — the wings of the wind — must know."

"The wind whispers no secrets," said the Indian.

Still she hesitated. She could no longer see the Indian's face. The moon had dipped behind a hill, and the forest was dark.

"Does the sister of the snow desire that any from the house on the hill should know she sought the shelter of the forest?" questioned the Indian.

"No, oh, no!" replied Aveline quickly.

"Then let her lie still as the moonlight on the snow," he said, and before she understood what he meant she saw his dark figure upon the path beyond.

Then there came a low whistle, and Aveline's heart beat loudly. In spite of her fear, she lifted her head.

Against the white snow she saw what might be two figures. Her ears served her better than her eyes.

"Ah, you are waiting. It is well. Here is your packet. Take it to the white brother, and this is to reward you for your pains."

There was no mistaking Geysbert's voice.

"Next moon I shall look for you again," he said, and the Indian's answer was too low to reach Aveline's ears. She heard Geysbert's response.

"It is all he'll get. If he be not satisfied, it is more than he deserves. Tell him so, if so be you can remember the message."

It took all the self-control of which she was capable to prevent Aveline from springing up and confronting the speaker. Her breath came in short gasps. She was far from obeying the Indian's injunction to be as noiseless as the moonlight on the snow.

Luckily, Geysbert was thinking only of his own part of the performance, and when that was accomplished he turned on his heel, and made straight for the manor house. The Indian disappeared at the same moment. Had he forsaken her? Aveline waited and listened. Then she raised herself from the snow and uttered a low cooing cry, somewhat resembling the note of a wild pigeon. It was always Helmer's signal to her when they wandered through the forest. Low as it was, it had scarcely left her lips when a shrill squeal, so indicative of some wild creature of the forest that she turned her head sharply, sounded near at hand. She dropped back and lay quite still.

"Will the white squaw trust her packet to the wings of the wind?"

Again the Indian was by her side, though she had not seen him come.

She drew it forth, and at the same time proffered a string of wampum.

"You will deliver it into his own hand?" she said.

"Into his and no other," replied the Indian.

Geysbert had been back at the manor house for fully an hour when Aveline crept up to her room, shivering and excited. The white clothing was covered now with a dark mantle, but she was none the less relieved that she had encountered no one.

Aveline's eyes were bright, and there was hope in her heart. Her letter was even now on its way to Helmer. She did not need to ask herself how it would be received. When the answer came she might be in a position to give Geysbert a taste of the scorn that was burning to reveal itself. She was certain now that Helmer knew as little how matters stood at the manor house as the inhabitants of the manor house knew how it fared with him. When he knew all, who could tell what the result would be?

CHAPTER XXX

THE upspringing of a great hope is as peace-destroying as the crushing weight of a mighty sorrow. The heart lifts itself to meet the possible joy, ruthlessly overturning, by that one impulse, the gentle virtues that patience has zealously fostered. The upheaval in Aveline's heart was all the more violent for the restraints she had laid upon herself. For madam's sake she had put her tongue in fetters, for it tried her as much to hear Helmer defended as to listen while any condemned him.

"If he had been innocent he would have found some means of communicating with me," madam said. "He has not done so. There is but one inference."

And to all Aveline's hot words of protest she opposed the answer of those tightly pressed, silent lips. Once, when the girl's excitement caused her to go further than usual, she said:

"My child, the flame of indignation keeps the young heart warm, but the old heart is scorched by it. Spare me, child. I am old, and sorrow has not spared me."

Aveline could do no less than seek to soothe her by obeying her commands. The girl had grown very tender towards madam, though at heart she cried out against her decision. Now, with this rising up of hope within her, it was harder than ever to keep silence, to be calm and still in madam's presence. She was possessed by a restlessness she could not control.

"Child, what ails you? The very spirit of unrest seems to have taken possession of you," madam said.

Aveline looked at her for a moment, and the tears welled up in her eyes.

"I think it has," she said.

Madam did not turn away and busy herself with her knitting, as she often did when Aveline's impetuosity overstepped the bounds which madam had set about herself and those who were with her. She looked at the girl long and kindly, and her own eyes grew dim.

"Keep your faith, if you can," she said, breaking the silence. "A groundless faith is a poor prop, but it is better than none."

And Aveline could not tell her of the new hope in her heart. It would be cruelty to speak of the treachery of her elder son until she could assure her of the innocence of the younger.

"Patience, patience," whispered the girl to herself. "In fourteen days the answer will come. It *will*, for Helmer will not fail her, now he knows."

She turned on madam an April-day smile, more than half tears.

"If the prop should prove to be well grounded, even the faithless may yet cling to it," she said.

After that she tried to school her face to tell no more tales. For fourteen days she must awaken neither hope nor fear, however much she herself was distracted by such emotions. Madam must not be distressed. Aveline did not hide the truth from herself. The letter Geysbert sent from New York had done what the fever could not do. Madam's stout heart had succumbed before the news it brought, and there was no more strength in it for the conflict of hope and fear. She had loved both her boys, but she had trusted Helmer as she had never trusted Geysbert. And he had failed her. It was a blow from which she could not recover. Her hold on life gave way. She was not ill, but she had grown suddenly old.

Geysbert seemed more than usually bold and self-assertive in the days which followed that stolen journey

to the forest. He was gathering up the reins more tightly into his own hands. His mother left everything to him now, and on his part he treated her with a tender consideration that could not but be soothing to her. Her elder son had never been so attentive, so thoughtful of her wishes, as now that the younger had forsaken her, and gone out into the world a wanderer. Outside, however, he allowed his hand to be felt.

"Mr. Geysbert has a mind to be master over his brother's inheritance as well as his own," remarked Ryseck Schredel to her husband. "I thought he was to content himself with his big new possession near by the city, and leave the old home to Mr. Helmer."

"It's nothing less than all there is to have that will content him in these days," said Philip, between the long puffs at his pipe. "He's got his hand on the lot, maidens and all, and it'll go hard with him if he take not his pick."

"Aye, and there'll be but a sorry picking left for the other, when his pick has been taken," said Ryseck.

To meet Geysbert with a semblance of friendliness was the hardest thing in each of Aveline's days. For madam's sake she did it, but when madam retired to her own room, as she so often did now, Aveline's face grew hard, and her tone uncompromising. The change in her was not unnoticed by Geysbert, or by Probity, but both held their peace. Only in Geysbert's heart there was growing a deeper bitterness, that took in, not his brother only, but this girl whom he loved in spite of her defiance of him. He was as desperately angry with her as he was in love with her. Once or twice, when she met him with a more than usually pronounced rebuff, his eyes gleamed dangerously. Aveline did not notice them. She was thinking of his discomfiture when the fourteen days were over, and she was at liberty to do more than merely discourage his advances.

She wanted to tell him plainly what she thought of him, to let her contempt have full scope. At least she would have the pleasure of seeing the flush of shame on his cheek. She did not rightly know what she expected as a result of her letter to Helmer. If it should bring complete deliverance from the sorrow and suspense that were overshadowing the manor house, she would not be surprised. In any case it would bring news of Helmer, reliable news, and that message for his mother, for the want of which she had come to think him guilty. So much was certain, for she had told him all — Geysbert's report, his conclusion that his brother was guilty, madam's hopeless sorrow, and Arent Hooghland's watchful hatred. And she had promised to be in the same spot in the forest on the fourteenth night from the sending of her letter. She had no fear that Helmer would fail her.

Perhaps returning hope quickened Aveline's sight, or it may have been that each day as it passed told appreciably on madam's resources. To Aveline it seemed that the fourteen days had marked a definite change, a lessening of her hold on the things of life. Bit by bit she had given up the responsibilities of the household, leaving more and more to the two girls. Now she neglected even the supervision of affairs, and in the last week Aveline noticed that she seldom asked questions.

"Do your own way, dear child, I have no doubt it will be right," she said, when Aveline appealed to her for directions.

There was suppressed excitement about the girl when, on the afternoon of the fourteenth day, she stooped suddenly and kissed madam's cheek. She did it in passing, and would have gone on, but madam's hand detained her.

"You may be right, child," she said.

"Madam, I *am* right."

There was a light in Aveline's eyes. Madam sighed and released her.

"Madam," said Aveline later on, when the daylight had faded, and the tall candles in the big sconces gave a subdued light in the large room, "I have finished the apron upon which I was working, and which I had designed for Ryseck Schredel. If you do not object, I will carry it to her to-night, and talk with her awhile."

"Aye, go if you will," said madam. "Ryseck's words are strong, but her heart is right, and she and you will not quarrel."

For a moment a little of the old light was in madam's eye as she looked at the girl.

"No, we shall not quarrel," said Aveline. "Ryseck is a woman of discernment."

But, woman of discernment though she was, Aveline did not stay long with her on that occasion. She was so full of impatience that the five minutes she spent in the good woman's cottage were a sore trial to her. The walk in the forest was before her, and the triumph to succeed it. For it would be a triumph over Geysbert in any case, of that she felt sure.

There was no denying that she shrank from plunging into the darkness under the trees. The night was cloudy, and there was no moon. Prowling wild beasts were undoubtedly in the thickets beyond, and the danger of losing her way was not small. She knew the forest a little, having often come to it with Helmer, who delighted in teaching her woodcraft; but in the darkness the path looked unfamiliar.

Outside the wood the snow was going fast, but within, among the trees, it yet held its own. More than once, in that walk, Aveline grew bewildered, and feared that she had missed her way. If she failed to reach the appointed spot, all would be lost, and Helmer would think she had failed him. Once or twice a sudden rush,

ing sound close by her side made her stand still in quick alarm. There was so little light that she could not tell what creature was near. Was she in the path at all? Surely not, or she would have reached her hiding place before this. It had taken her hours longer to come than on the former occasion — or she thought it had.

What news awaited her at the end? Suppose it should be ill news, after all? She shook off her fear. It unnerved her.

Would there ever be an end? That was more to the point. Where was she? Could it be that she —

The question was not finished. She stumbled forward into a deep hole, left by an uprooted tree. Then, half-stunned, she partly raised herself from the ground, and immediately gave vent to a low, glad laugh, the outward sign of pressure on excited nerves. She had fallen into her appointed waiting place. The object in front of her was no other than Tyte's fallen tree. Now she was safe. She had but to wait for the message.

Hark! What was that? The low cooing of a pigeon. She did not stop to think — nor to fear. She gave a quick answer. She stood up, trembling, but not with terror. That was not the voice of the Indian. Dozens of times that low call had come to her in the forest. It was Helmer's own signal, and — that was Helmer's voice.

"Aveline! My darling!"

Both hands were in his, and he had bent his head till his lips met hers.

"Oh, Helmer! I have wanted — *we* have wanted you so!"

She heard the quick heavy breathing, and felt the pressure of his hands.

"Help me, dear," he said. "It is hard to remember that he is my brother."

That appeal brought Aveline to a consciousness of all that was at stake, and of the responsibilities of that hour.

"We must not forget — for madam's sake," she said. "Oh, Helmer, we must make her understand."

"Understand what, dear?"

"Why, that you could not do what they said."

"Bless you for your trust," he said. "If you had asked whether or not I was innocent, I think I could not have borne it."

"Why should I ask about what I know already?" replied Aveline. "But I want to know why you cannot prove it. I — Helmer, it seems cowardly to run away."

"Many a time I have been on the point of returning," he said, "but the case is black against me, and Geysbert warned me to keep away at any cost. I waited to hear what my mother would say. I have sent letter after letter."

"And he destroyed them all. How dare he —"

"Hush, dear! Probity would say that there was danger in letting our angry passions loose."

Aveline could feel the smile, though she did not see it. She drew closer to him. He put his arm about her.

"If this had not happened, would you ever have come to me thus?" he said. "I may not ask it now, but —"

"If you will not take it now, you — you could not have cared enough about it to have had a right to it then," she said, half tearfully, half defiantly.

"Aveline!"

They both forgot the night, and the suspicion that hung over one of them, and the dangers ahead. There was no loneliness for Aveline in the forest now, and she did not know that the wind blew coldly. As for Helmer, he was content. Aveline believed in him, Aveline was his, now and always. No! He drew himself up to his full height, and his hold relaxed.

"It is very sweet," he said, "but it must not be, at least until all the world acknowledges that I am worthy of you."

"I am not going to ask all the world," she said.

And he — well, he had just made a very virtuous resolve, but who could expect that lips which spoke such words would be resisted?

"And you would give yourself to me as I am — a suspected murderer?" he asked tenderly.

"That way, or none," she said decidedly.

It was a long, sweeping gust of wind that awoke Helmer from the forgetfulness of that hour.

"I am selfish," he said. "Tell me about my mother."

Aveline's voice trembled as she obeyed, and before the story was finished, her head was on his shoulder, and her voice was broken with tears. A big warm drop came splashing on her forehead.

"Poor little mother!" Helmer's voice was choked. "I must go to her. And yet it must be done cautiously, for — Geysbert is not to be trusted. And for her sake we must risk as little as possible."

"What have you to fear from Geysbert?" asked Aveline. "What evidence is there against you?"

Then he told her all, and she stood silently listening.

"The negro himself is the murderer," she said. "There was no other to do it."

"It seems as if it must be so," he replied. "But how to prove it? I cannot expect to secure the evidence of the boat's crew. To appeal to them would be to involve them in difficulty. And they think me guilty, in any case."

"Then we must wait, and watch the negro," said Aveline. "His past should be hunted up."

"Why, you are a splendid little counsellor," said Helmer. "I thought of that myself, and wrote to Geys-

bert about it, but he returned no answer to that part of my letter. He believes me guilty."

"Yes."

The one word was so expressive that no other was needed.

"And now, dear, when do you think I can see my mother?" asked Helmer at last.

"Why, you will see her to-night, won't you? You must be away before morning."

"It would be safer," he said.

"Yes. Arent Hooghland is horribly vindictive."

She shuddered as she recalled his words, and his savage frown whenever he encountered her.

"But my mother must not be startled — and she must on no account be told more harm of Geysbert than is absolutely necessary."

"What? You will spare him?"

Aveline spoke hotly.

"No, but I will spare my mother."

Aveline thought of the sad, weary face, and the closed lips, and her heart grew heavy for madam. This joy would be but a half joy for her. The conviction that her younger son was worthy would be purchased by the knowledge that the elder had deceived her.

"Poor madam! Yes, we must spare her," she said.

It was late before Aveline stood by the door of the manor house; so late that her courage failed her. She would explain to madam before long, but not now and before Probity. A sudden impatience of Probity's presence took possession of her. Why was she here, or, if here, why did she allow her judgment to be warped by Geysbert's influence? Her calm eyes were more disturbing than madam's sharpest words.

But Aveline was not called upon to encounter those disapproving eyes. She opened the door noiselessly, and entered the hall. Probity was nowhere to be seen.

She passed quickly up the stairs, stopping suddenly on the topmost step. That was Probity's voice. No other had in it such mournful music. It came from madam's own room, and the door was ajar. Aveline hesitated. To reach her own room she must pass that open door. She waited until Probity spoke again, and then summoned her courage, and with quick, noiseless step passed through the line of light.

They had not seen her. She was safe, but she was not thinking of her safety. In that minute of passing, words had reached her ears, and they were repeating themselves without will of her own.

"Aye, dear aunt, you are right. The pain of the transgressor must of a surety be greater than that which his act inflicted. Think of it. My poor cousin! Blood guiltiness upon him! A wanderer, and rightly so."

The voice dropped to a low, mournful lament, and Aveline heard a quick sob in response. Her heart burned. She no longer feared to tell madam, but her hands trembled with excitement, and she felt that her voice was hoarse. For a few minutes she waited, busying herself with putting away all traces of her journey. Then she heard Probity go down-stairs, closing madam's door behind her. Aveline did not hesitate. She went swiftly to it, and knocked.

"What is it?" asked madam in surprise. She had not expected to be disturbed again to-night.

"May I come in?"

Aveline's tone was pleading.

"Surely. Why, I thought you were in bed!"

Madam yet sat in her chair by the fire. She looked inquiringly at Aveline.

"Madam! Dear madam!"

Aveline crossed the room swiftly, and dropped on her knees by the old lady, laying her head in her lap.

"Why, my dear child, what is it?"

It was madam's hand that trembled now.

"Oh, madam, if it were all joy, it would be so much easier to tell," she said, "but now — it is lifting one burden to drop another in its place."

"You have something to tell me?"

Aveline had raised her head, and put her hand in madam's. The pressure on it increased until it was almost painful.

"Yes. Madam — I was right. I have seen Helmer."

The hold upon her hand tightened, and then relaxed. Madam's face grew very white. She tried to rise.

"Help me," she said imperatively. "Where is he? I must go to him."

"Nay, but he will come to you — soon," said Aveline, as she gently pressed her back into her chair. "He sent me to tell you."

"You have seen him?"

"Yes."

"And you were right?"

"I was right."

The girl said it proudly.

"Did Helmer say so?"

"Indeed, yes. He has been grievously sinned against, but, madam, he has not sinned."

For a minute madam did not speak. Her head was bowed.

"If Helmer said so, it is true. He would not lie," she said at last. Then she added impatiently, "Why does he not come? I am ready to see him."

"Madam, it is not safe. He has enemies, and he knows not how to clear himself. There are more difficulties than we have understood. His enemies are watching for his life, and — worst of all — his brother believes in his guilt, and has worked against him."

"Geysbert?"

"Yes. But we must not blame him too much." Aveline spoke eagerly. "He thinks Helmer guilty."

Madam sighed.

"Tell me all, child," she said.

"I think — Helmer would rather tell you himself."

"You are right," said madam. "It is due to him — and to me."

She had borne the shock well, but there was a dazed expression on her face that Aveline did not altogether like. It passed as she had time to think.

"You think that Geysbert is capable of working — has worked — against his brother?" she said.

"Madam, I know it."

"Then it will be best that he should not see Helmer."

"That was what we thought."

"He is not in yet. There! I hear his voice."

Aveline went to the door and listened.

"You are right," she said. "He has come in."

"How soon is Helmer coming?"

"Not till twelve."

"That is well. The house will then be still."

Madam was her old self again, capable of planning for her boy's safety.

"You have arranged to let him in?" she asked.

"Yes. I am to go outside at twelve, if all be safe."

"Put out the lights," said madam. "It is time the house was abed. And come, sit quietly here by me."

She took the girl's hand in hers, and together they waited and listened. The house grew gradually still. First Geysbert's, and then Probity's step was heard coming upstairs. Probity stopped for a moment by her aunt's door, but hearing no sound, she passed on. Madam must be in bed, she thought, and she felt a strong wave of pity for the bruised heart that had shown her to-night some of its soreness.

The stillness lasted for many minutes, and then a soft footstep went down-stairs, and the door was opened.

"Mother!"

"My boy."

Aveline saw Helmer cross the room almost at a run, saw madam come to meet him with hands outstretched, and then shut the door and went away to her own room. Then the excitement of the long evening, the reaction from fear to joy, and the strain of suspense yet left, told upon her, and she smothered her head in the bed-clothes, and cried till either her tears or her sorrows were exhausted. Afterward she got up and bathed her face, anxious, even in this hour, that it should not be disfigured with weeping. She heard the opening of a door. Was some one in the house astir, or did Helmer want her? She stole out into the upper hall. Helmer was coming to meet her.

"Come with me," he said. "She wants you."

He led her in.

"Bless us, mother," he said, "and give her to me. She belongs to me anyhow."

"Is it so, my child?"

Madam's voice was very gentle.

"Yes, madam."

"Then it should be mother," she said. "And right glad I am that it should be so. Kiss me, my daughter."

She took the girl in her arms.

"Helmer, you can afford to forgive your brother," she said. "You have gained what he sorely coveted."

"Madam, he could never have had it," said Aveline quickly.

Madam smiled.

"Probity is right. This heart has need of discipline," she said.

"Did my cousin say so?" asked Helmer. "Probity is wise, yet at times she is sadly short-sighted."

"My mother thinks it safest for me to keep away until there is some chance of being cleared," explained Helmer. "She says, like you, that the negro should be watched."

"Yes. I will attend to that myself," said madam. "I ought to have gone to New York in the first instance. Geysbert was too easily led astray."

"But, mother, you are not fit to go."

"You know nothing about it," replied madam, in her old imperious manner. "What does a boy know of his mother's powers?"

"Or of her love?"

Helmer stooped and kissed the white, wrinkled forehead.

"I will take Aveline," said madam.

It was a long, happy night, in spite of the sorrow behind, and perhaps before. Madam herself brought it to an end.

"You must go," she said. "You must be far away before morning."

She had made many plans for his safety, providing him with means to insure the help of the Indians, and giving him much advice. At last she put her arms about him.

"Now you must go," she said.

She would have gone down-stairs with him, but he would not permit it.

"Aveline will let me out, and fasten the door after me," he protested.

He took his farewell of Aveline there, in his mother's room.

"Now you are mine," he said, "and I care not where I go. I have you and my mother to think of."

They reached the hall door, and Helmer opened it.

"Good-by," he said, and stooped once more to kiss her. When he lifted his head it was to look into the face of his brother.

"You? And you dare to do that!"

Geysbert lifted his clenched hand.

Helmer moved quickly aside.

"Not here, and now," he said. "Remember our mother."

"I remember nothing but that you are a murderer, and that you have dared to put your lips to hers."

Geysbert was beside himself. At that instant he could have delivered up his brother to Arent Hoogland's malice.

"You know that what you say is untrue. You know that it is *you* who have deceived us all, and cheated him, aye, and almost taken your mother's life. Who is the murderer, if not you?"

Aveline stood before him, her face ablaze, her eyes looking into his with scorching scorn. The opportunity for which she had waited had come.

"I have nothing to say to you in the matter," said Geysbert savagely. "I have only to deal with him. Aye, and by my life I'll do it."

"What will you do, my son?"

Madam's voice was not raised above its ordinary tones, but it thrilled the three who listened to it. For the moment Geysbert quailed before it. When madam spoke thus her sons were in the habit of listening, yes, and of giving her the answer she demanded.

Geysbert looked at her, and from her to the others. When his eye met Aveline's his passion burst even the barriers of his mother's authority.

"I will bring him to the retribution he deserves. I will teach him what it means to come here and palm himself off for an honest man — he — a murderer!"

"You will betray your brother?"

"Yes, I will."

"Then you are no son of mine. Go! This is no place for you."

Madam spoke firmly. Her eyes flashed. Geysbert hesitated.

"If I go, it will be the worse for all concerned," he said.

"Mother! Geysbert! Let it rest. I am going," said Helmer. "Geysbert, how can you, how dare you, try her thus?"

For madam's face had grown white to the very lips. Helmer put his arm about her.

"Let me help you upstairs again, mother," he said.

"No. Not till he either leaves this house, or retracts what he has said."

Geysbert stood irresolute.

"I will do him no injury," he said at last, sullenly and savagely, "if he will keep away. But I believe him guilty. He has told a pack of lies to you, and you believe him. I have sifted the evidence, and I know. Let him stay away. He shall have all the money he needs, and shall be safe. But if he come here, and — and dare to try to take the place of a son of this house, I will not answer for the consequences."

"Let it be so," said Helmer, whose eyes were fixed on his mother's face. Then he whispered: "You must not distress yourself thus. You know you are going to clear me."

"True, my son," she answered, in the same low voice.

"Geysbert," said Helmer, "I accept banishment for the present. You are unjust, and you know it. But for my mother's sake I will go. Be good to her, however bad you have been to me."

He turned, took madam in his arms, and went upstairs. When he came down again, his face was set.

“Remember, I expect at least that you will be good to her,” he said. “She cannot bear much more. I will not answer now for what your brutality to-night has done.”

His hand touched Aveline's. He gave her one lingering look, and disappeared in the darkness.

CHAPTER XXXI

“**I** THINK, dear Geysbert, that the principle upon which you have acted is right. A weak leniency is the most subtle form of temptation. Sin must surely be punished, however much we love the sinner. Nay, the greater our love, the more it must weigh against him in our judgment, for we need to guard jealously lest natural affection impel us to shield him from the consequences of his ill-doing.”

“My mother thinks differently.”

Geysbert's fingers tapped impatiently on the high mantelshelf. He looked down at Probity. Her face, white and passionless, was yet full of tender feeling for him in his perturbed mood. Truly, as madam had remarked, Geysbert was singularly blind. He attached but slight importance to Probity's ever-ready sympathy, though, if at any moment it had failed him, he would have missed it sadly.

“My poor aunt has suffered much,” responded Probity, “and I fear her heart was ever weak where her loved ones were concerned.”

“Helmer is deceiving her, and she is determined to let him.” Geysbert's tone was wrathful. “I would have saved her from it, and from him. But she will have her own way.”

“My heart is sore for her,” rejoined Probity. “She is seeking to heal the wounded spirit with the balm of earthly love.”

“I knew just how it would be,” continued Geysbert. “It was solely for her sake that I kept the letters from her. I was convinced she was weak enough to believe them. If Helmer had had any reasonable tale to tell, I would

have given him the benefit of the doubt; but the story was so manifestly a lie, that I felt it my duty to shield my mother from further contact with one who was bent on deceiving her."

"I believe you were actuated by right motives," said Probity kindly, "but perchance you may yet come to see that, even for a good cause, we may not stoop to subterfuge. My mind acquits you of evil intent, nay, it commends the motive which led to the transgression, yet to me all deceit, all want of openness, is sin. I would not willingly grieve you, cousin, but I must be honest with my own soul and yours."

There were tears in her eyes as she lifted them towards him.

"You are too much of a saint for me," he said irritably. "Such scruples are beyond me. I acted for the best, let my mother say what she may."

Geysbert was disturbed, grievously disturbed. He had seen his cherished plans upset before his eyes. He had determined that Aveline and Helmer should never again meet, and he had come face to face with them at a moment when he could not fail to see how fully they understood each other. His deceit had answered no end. His reward was Aveline's scorn, and madam's just indignation. He was writhing under a sense of failure. The night had been a trying one. Called to madam's presence immediately after his brother's departure, he had gone with hot anger scorching his heart. Aveline's words when she came to summon him had not tended to cool his passion.

"I do not know whether it be a matter of any importance to you," she said, "but madam's life hangs by a more slender thread than you perchance realize, and you have touched it roughly enough for one night."

He scowled at her, and strode up the stairs. However frail madam's hold on life might be, he found that

her hold on circumstances was sufficiently strong. Her will had suffered no weakening. She insisted on a full and explicit account of his dealings with Helmer, and her sharp, imperative questions cut through the sophistry of his arguments, and made him feel like a culprit while he posed as a virtuous defender of right.

Madam exhibited extreme candour on that occasion, and took the opportunity to lay before her elder son some rather unpleasant alternatives. He found it expedient to show less virulence as the interview progressed, though he steadfastly refused to allow any doubt on the subject of Helmer's guilt. He had decided that Helmer was guilty. His whole course of action had been planned on the supposition that he was guilty. It was absolutely essential to his peace of mind that Helmer should be guilty. He would not admit the possibility of mistake. But he admitted the danger of a too vigorous course of action against his brother. His mother's will was — and always had been — law at the manor house.

"You are unjust to me," he said sullenly. "You are deceived, and you want to be. I would never have acted as I have done if I had not been absolutely certain that Helmer's hand dealt Myndert that blow."

"The heart that desires to believe evil finds no difficulty about ways and means," said madam. "Be honest with yourself, my son, and then you will be more honest towards your brother."

"I cannot see your way," said Geysbert at last. "But I wash my hands of the whole business. Only let Helmer keep away. The sight of him here — after what he has done — is more than I can stand. Myndert was my friend, and I saw him after the cruel wound was given. I shall never forget that face — nor that Helmer was responsible for it."

Madam sighed.

"It is not so much your judgment that needs convincing, as your heart," she said. "Yet you believe what you say. So far you are honest. I can talk no more. I am tired, very tired. Leave me now. If Aveline be below, tell her to go to bed, though it is late for such an injunction. And you — go you to bed likewise."

It was not a recommendation, it was a command. He laughed impatiently.

"Does a mother's command seem irritating to you?" she asked.

"You think I am a boy still," he said.

"Nay — but I wish you were."

She laid her hand on his arm. He took it in his. Then he stooped and kissed her.

"I am going to bed," he said.

"Thank you, my son. I will try to rest."

There was a lessening of the tension of madam's face as she spoke, and a nervous quiver of her lower lip. Geysbert saw it, and it smote him with a sudden pain. He stooped over her again.

"Poor little mother!" he said. "Your sons are a sad trouble to you."

Aveline's anger against Geysbert had been fierce enough in that early morning to threaten a disturbance of the peace. Before night came, however, Geysbert was a very secondary thought. For it was clear to Aveline that the excitement had dangerously reduced madam's stock of strength. She did not attempt to rise. She lay fighting off weakness with that unquenchable will of hers.

"I must rest. I am going to New York," she said. "We will clear him yet — you and I, my daughter."

"You were altogether wrong in your judgment, child," she said to Probity. "I have seen my son Helmer, and he has satisfactorily explained that which was mysteri-

ous. It only remains to clear him. That may possibly be a long business, but I shall set about it as soon as I feel stronger."

"And in the meantime you must rest, dear aunt," said Probity pityingly.

"Yes. I must rest. I have need of all my strength."

Aveline watched that fight between weakness and determination with intense anxiety. She had never loved madam as she loved her now. They were one in sympathy. They two were alone, for it was soon evident that Probity inclined to Geysbert's view of the case, and still believed Helmer guilty. Madam took the knowledge very quietly.

"You must judge for yourself," she said, when an answer to one of her remarks had shown her the bent of Probity's thought. "You will do that in any case, I doubt not. For so young a maid you have a singularly strong reliance on the wisdom of your own judgment."

The week after Helmer's visit found madam still fighting against weakness as determinately as ever, and to all appearance making a successful fight.

"April is already here," she said. "Before it is over we will go."

To Aveline she was the Madam Feljer of old, but with more tenderness. Her lips had lost their tight pressure. Even Geysbert's attitude did not altogether discourage her.

"Geysbert was ever passionate," she said. "Yet we must not forget the provocation. You were always before him, my child, and you are — a great temptation, to say the least of it."

Aveline smiled, and shook her head.

"Yet Geysbert is not all evil," continued madam. "He has allowed his judgment to be led astray. He honestly believes Helmer guilty — because he wishes so to believe. Let him find himself in the wrong, and

know of a certainty that his brother is innocent, and he will repent of his injustice, and be ashamed of his deceit."

As the days passed, madam grew strong enough to make active preparations for her journey, but sometimes Aveline watched her fearfully. Her strength was so manifestly the result of a determined gathering together of all her forces. She gained because she would gain. How long would such an effort last? Would it really give the failing body power?

"Mother, the ducks are coming northward," announced Geysbert one afternoon.

"Then good-by to law and order for the present," said madam. "Are you going to wait here, or meet the birds at the swamp?"

"At the swamp. It is the best place."

Geysbert seemed more like himself than he had done since his journey to New York. For the time, the excitement of the duck-shooting had put everything else out of his mind. The passing of great flocks of pigeons, ducks, and geese, made the month of April a lively season among the Dutch settlers. The very slaves were then possessed with the spirit of license. At dawn of day every hand that could hold a gun was uplifted against the life of some feathered traveller. Ducks and geese were the only things thought of, and about this time they appeared on the table in every guise. On the Feljer estate there was a large swamp close to the river. Hither came the ducks each year in passing, and here the slaughter was immense. Geysbert was eager to be off. There was little less excitement among the negroes.

"I will not stay away more than two nights at a time," said Geysbert, looking a little doubtfully at madam.

"It will not hurt you to come back on the second

day," she said, "but you'll be of no use for anything but duck-shooting until the birds are all gone."

When he had disappeared madam turned to her own preparations again.

"I shall leave you in charge," she said to Probity, "but Ryseck Schredel must come to look after you. You are a steady maid enough, yet I shall rest better for the knowledge that the eye of an older woman is over everything. I have already spoken to Ryseck."

"It shall be as you desire in all things, dear aunt," answered Probity.

"Well?" said madam inquiringly. "What was beneath those words?"

Probity started. Had she allowed her thought to appear so plainly?

"Did there seem aught behind?" she asked. "I did not mean that it should be so. I was but thinking that you were unfit to take so great a journey. You look so frail, dear aunt."

She did look frail — frailer than usual. Aveline had seen it when she went to madam in the morning, and it was that, although he did not know it, which had made Geysbert arrange to come back in two days. Probity's eyes had been following her aunt's movements for a long time.

"Frail, do I? I am not very robust, surely," said madam. "Rest suits me best. I will even go and take it."

She rose to go to her room, but she walked to the window instead. The light was fading, though it was strong enough to show the delicate outline of her face. Aveline thought it had never looked so delicate before.

"There is an Indian approaching the house," said madam calmly. "Aveline, go you and see what he wants. Perchance he has a packet for me. And make

sure, in that case, that he remain until an answer is ready."

Aveline gave one startled look, and turned to the door.

"There is no haste, my child," said madam warningly. "The coming of an Indian is no unusual occurrence. This one is to be met as all others."

Aveline restrained her impetuosity. She saw the danger of attracting notice. As madam had said, the visit of an Indian was no unusual thing. And on closer inspection she perceived that this one carried some ducks. She approached him nervously. Did he indeed bring letters from Helmer?

"You must not go in the forest alone again," Helmer had said. "It is not safe, and Geysbert might suspect. I will communicate directly with my mother."

"The sister of the snow is welcomed by the wings of the wind," said the Indian, in a low tone.

"You bring letters?" asked Aveline.

"From the white brother."

"You are welcome," she said. "And these ducks—bring them to the house, and I will see that a suitable present is made you."

She went on ahead to make arrangements. The precious packet was hidden in her dress.

"Aveline!"

Probity's voice greeted her when she returned to the hall.

"Yes, I am coming," said the girl breathlessly.

"Madam has gone to her room. Come upstairs."

Something in Probity's tone stopped the eager beating of Aveline's heart.

"She is ill," said Probity; "take her the letter."

Aveline checked the exclamation that rose to her lips as she entered the room. The blue-white look of

madam's face frightened her. She had much difficulty in controlling the expression of her fear.

"Come here, child."

Madam's voice was faint. Aveline sprang towards her, and put her arms about her.

"What is it, dear — mother?"

"I have fought against weakness and been defeated, my child. That is all. Read what he says."

She forgot her weakness as Aveline read, and the light came back to her eye. The letter was full of loving words, and assurances that the writer would be very cautious.

"Yet, if there should be need of me," he said, "I am not far away. Send for me, and I will come."

As Aveline read the words she heard a low sob.

"There *is* need," said madam. "Let him come."

"Yes. And Probity?" whispered Aveline, in a voice that was choked.

"Probity will stay with me the first half of the night. I shall need her. At eleven you will take her place, and she will go to bed. As soon after that as possible he must come."

Madam's voice had grown faint again.

"Go, see about it," she said. "And send Probity to me. Even the task of climbing on to yonder bed has become too much for my strength."

The tears were on Aveline's cheeks as she went to find Probity. She had not far to go. The girl was waiting at the head of the stairs.

"She is ill — very ill," said Aveline tearfully.

"Geysbert must be summoned."

"Not to-night. We must do madam's will. She will herself summon him when she thinks best."

Aveline spoke hastily. She was fearful. If Probity should send for Geysbert, all would be lost. She need not have feared. Madam had anticipated the difficulty.

"To-morrow, after daybreak, you must send for Geysbert," she said, as Probity entered, "but not before. Let the lad enjoy one morning's shooting in peace."

After Aveline had sent Probity to madam, she went to find the Indian. Helmer must come at once, there was no time to be lost.

"The white brother is wanted," she said. "How soon can he be here? His foot should be swift, for there is need of haste."

"Before that star dips behind the hills," replied the Indian, pointing to one which was far down.

"It is well. Give him this," she said.

Madam had not counted in vain on Probity's habit of obedience.

"Child," she said, "you are very good and thoughtful. I should find it hard to do without you. Strive-well lent to me a treasure of value when he sent me you. You have accorded to me a daughter's loving service. To-night I would try that service further by laying a command upon you. At eleven Aveline is to come to me, and remain all night. I desire that at that hour you should go to your bed, and to sleep. Unless I send for you, I ask that you should not rise. If I need you, I will send Aveline for you."

Probity looked at her earnestly.

"I would not be intrusive," she said, "but I have surely more experience than Aveline, and, dear aunt, I fear you are seriously ill."

"Yes, I am ill. That is why I ask."

Madam's eyes were fixed on her niece.

"Your responsibilities go no further than your duties, my child," she added kindly, "and sometimes the duty of acquiescence in the will of another is the highest form of service. Does the fact that your father committed you to my charge give me no right to command?"

Again Probity hesitated. Her face was troubled.

"I will obey you, dear aunt," she said, after that momentary silence, and she said it very gently.

"I did not doubt that you would, my dear," replied madam, and then she lay quite still, and to Probity it seemed that every minute her face grew whiter. She was lying thus when her niece left her, and when Helmer came.

"Mother! If I had only known sooner!" he said.

"There was nothing to know. Until to-night I was expecting to go to New York. I shall never go now, Helmer."

"No. You must not think of that. I shall be cleared some day."

Through the hours of the night he sat by her, his hand in hers. As it grew towards morning Aveline left them, the mother and son, alone. She went down into the room where madam had been sitting a few hours before, planning for her journey. Aveline turned to the chair she had occupied. What would that room be without her? She shivered, and put fresh wood on the fire. It blazed up in a manner suggestive of hope and comfort. There were tears on the girl's cheeks, and a weary, desolate sorrow in her eyes. The firelight fell on the grieved face, and was reflected by the falling tears.

Just so Helmer found her long after, when he came softly down the stairs. The picture of that room, as he saw it then, never faded from his brain. The dark warmth of the brown wainscot, the brown carved furniture, and the great brown press where the linen was kept, was brightened by the sheen of the brass sconces, in which candles — made from the wax of the wax-myrtle berry, that they might give out a balsamic perfume when extinguished — burned with a soft light. The firelight danced back from the surface of the brass box where dried hemp-stalks waited to be made useful

in lighting the candles, and fell on the long blow-pipe, so essential an article when the fire burned low and needed its rousing breath, or the lights that were above reach were to be blown out. The blue of old Delft jars and plaques mingled with the browns, and in the midst of all was the figure of Aveline, drooping and sad, with a face that lighted up as he came towards her.

"My mother sent me away," he said. "I would risk all and stay, but she will not have it so. Oh, Aveline, it is bitter to leave her!"

"She has held out so long," said Aveline. "She set her will against the weakness, and it seemed as if she would win. She was so brave and determined."

"I shall not go far away," he said. "You must let me know before night. I shall send."

There was a sound above. The daylight was entering the room. He kissed her hastily.

"Go to her," he said. "She must not be left."

When Aveline went upstairs she found Probity with her aunt.

"It is morning, dear aunt Wyntie," the girl said. "Your commands did not extend beyond daylight."

Madam smiled faintly.

"As soon as it is light you may send for Geysbert," she replied.

The failure of strength was complete. By the time Geysbert arrived madam found speaking difficult. What she said to her elder son none knew. She sent Probity and Aveline away. When they returned she was lying with her hand in his. She smiled upon them, but did not speak. Her last words had been spoken to Geysbert. Before night came the manor house was in mourning. Madam was at its head no longer.

CHAPTER XXXII

"IT may be English law, for aught I know, but it's neither justice nor right."

The pewter bottle which Ryseck Schredel brandished as she spoke was brought so near to Philip's nose, in the energy of her remarks, that the good man retreated hastily.

"Better tell Mr. Geysbert so," said Philip drily.

"And do you think I've not told him so? Am I one to say less to a man's face than behind his back, eh? Since when has Ryseck Schredel turned coward, or lost the use of her tongue?"

"Nay, I never doubted the tongue," interposed Philip.

"And you've no need. Mr. Geysbert does not doubt it, I warrant you."

"What? You told him to his face?"

"That did I, and the truth lacked nothing in plainness by my handling, I'll swear."

"And what said he?" asked Philip, his heavy face growing red with the excitement of curiosity.

"What said he? That my business was to make the butter, and, since his mother had so decreed it, to take the oversight of the house, but that with action of his I had naught to do."

"Ah! That shut you up, my woman."

"Shut *me* up! Don't you know me yet, Philip Schredel? It's not many men have been foolish enough to try to shut me up, but when one sets himself to do it, he's likely to get more than he bargained for. Mr. Geysbert had got a lesson to learn, and I was the one to teach him it. And that he might have a chance to

learn it the better, I slammed to that door, and put my back against it, for safety's sake, and then he got a piece of my mind, and a good generous piece too, for all he is the young master."

"Ah!"

"Yes, he did. There were thoughts in my brain that wanted to be let out, and I let them come with a good stout sweep. He's no more right to the manor house, or to anything that belongs to it, than I have, and I told him so. And I didn't pick my words either. What care I for English law, or any other law, save the law of right and justice? His father meant the manor house for Helmer, and his mother would have left it to Helmer, if death had not overtaken the poor lady all of a sudden. That being so, I let him know that he was little better than a common thief to clutch hold of his brother's share as well as his own, almost before the breath was out of the poor woman's body. If there was no will, — and of that I was not so sure as most people, for I knew madam, dear lady, had either made one, or intended to make one, — it was none the less a robbery on his part to take his brother's possession. The will was in his mother's mind, and he could have read it there, aye, and had read it a dozen times, and whether it was writ down with a pen or not, it was in existence, for madam knew it, and he knew it, and we all knew it was meant to be, and he was cheating the dead as well as the living to behave as if there had been no will."

"I should have been sorry to have come across Mr. Geysbert directly after you told him that," said Philip slowly.

"That's a true word. You *would*. And you'd have had reason to be sorry. When a man has to listen against his will to what he knows is true, but what he'd give his eyes to be able to prove a lie, he shows the side of himself that's not nearest to the angel. I took occa-

sion to tell him that also. Since he must needs rampage, I deemed it best to give him something to rampage for."

"You hadn't it all to yourself, then? He found something to say as well as you, eh, old woman?"

"As *well*, say you? Do you call it well for a man to be driven by his passion to the use of words that are neither decent Dutch nor English? When a youth has to take to the fiery words of hell before he can give vent to his feelings, it's proof that he's got pretty much in sympathy with the doomed spirits whose language he borrows."

"You're a mighty woman, Ryseck," said Philip appreciatively, "yet it would have been small wonder if Mr. Geysbert had commanded you to go about your business."

"That did he, surely, but little cared I for his commands," said Ryseck. "I told him I *was* going about my business, and just now my business was to do what nobody else felt inclined to do, though doubtless all saw the need. His mother was not here to reprove him for his ill deeds, and I would even perform the duty for her. For the rest, I had come from Old Nederland to make the butter for madam, and the butter I should make, and since she had desired me to keep house for her, and see to the welfare of the young maidens, Mistress Probita and Mistress Aveline, I was going to respect her wishes, whatever he might see fit to do. The manor house was my place, and at the manor house I would stay."

It was true that Geysbert had shown considerable haste in making himself master of the manor house and all that pertained thereto. Since no will was found, the whole of the property fell to him as heir-at-law. He totally ignored Helmer's claim. In the preparations for the funeral, which were made on the extensive scale that

befitted Madam Feljer's rank, he made no mention of his brother. Once, indeed, Helmer's name was heard, and that was when Arent Hooghland presented himself at the manor house.

"I've got it on my mind that you'll be thinking that Helmer Feljer, my son Myndert's murderer, may with safety come back to madam's funeral," he said. "You're hugely mistaken if you think so. Let him set foot on this land, and wherever I see him, at his mother's grave, or over her dead body, I'll not hesitate. At that moment I strike for the revenge of my son. I give you fair warning. I'd shoot him at sight, but I'd rather see him hang. It is a death more worthy of him."

"I know nothing of Helmer Feljer," said Geysbert coldly. "The manor house is his home no longer. I see no reason why he should come here, any more than elsewhere. If he did not visit his mother in life, you have little reason to suppose he will do so now that she is dead."

Yet Arent Hooghland watched the house with jealous eyes, possibly more with the object of showing his power, than because he really believed that Helmer would venture to appear. He himself followed madam to the grave, amongst the rest of the tenants, that he might be quite sure her younger son was not there.

To those whose curiosity impelled them to question him on the subject of the existence of a will, Geysbert replied calmly.

"I believe there was once a will in which my father and mother left the manor house to my unfortunate brother," he said, "but it is not now to be found. I knew that there was in my mother's mind some idea of destroying that will. Doubtless she carried out her intention in the days between my brother's disappearance and her own serious illness. I feel no uneasiness about it. Had she wished it to be carried into effect, I am sure

she would have preserved it. My mother was a woman of careful habits. What she has done, she has done intentionally."

Aveline's indignation at his assumption of authority at the manor house knew no bounds. For a time it rendered her speechless. But when the funeral was over, she turned on him.

"Do you really mean to steal Helmer's birthright?" she asked one day, without preface of any kind.

"I am not aware that Helmer has a birthright, or a right of any kind," was the reply, and Geysbert looked steadily at the girl as he spoke. "It may sound brutal to say it, but the right to a rope's length is all he can claim under the circumstances."

The hot blood surged over Aveline's face, and then receded, leaving it white with emotion.

"You have sunk low," she said. "Truly, evil works apace. In the days when your father lived, you were not capable of this wrong."

"I thank you for your flattering words," he answered, and his lips twitched with the intensity of his passion. "Know, however, once for all, that I am master here — of the manor house, and of all my mother's possessions."

His glance at Aveline was significant. She understood, as he meant she should, and she quailed before it. Of the possessions which came to him by his mother's death and his brother's absence, there was one that he cared more about than all the rest. Nay, it was for this one that he valued the rest. His mother's maid was now his property. Had Helmer inherited the manor house, he would, along with it, have come into possession of all his mother's servants. It was not greed mainly — though Geysbert was not averse to the increased wealth — that made him rejoice in the inheritance which had fallen to him through Helmer's misfortune. His hold on Aveline was the first thing of which

he thought. He would have sacrificed all the estate rather than have given that up.

If Aveline shrank before the hidden meaning in his words, it did not take her long to rally.

"I have a concern of my own about which I would speak to you," she said. "I came here as your mother's maid. Dear madam is dead. I can be of no further use to her. I ask you for permission to buy my freedom. Nay," she said, as she saw the refusal in his eye, "I ask it not as a favour, but as a right. For madam and for your father I performed the duty of a daughter. They were both pleased to tell me so. I claim as a recompense of my services the right to pay you back the money you gave to Captain Crandal, and to call myself a free woman."

"And I deny that right."

Geysbert's eye was fixed upon her. There was in it triumph and passion mingled.

"You deny it?"

"I do."

"You pronounce yourself destitute of either shame or manliness?"

"If you choose to put it so, yes."

"Geysbert Feljer, I pity you more than I do myself. Until now I knew not how low it was possible for man to sink."

She turned from him to fasten herself in her room, and walk up and down in passionate despair. She had thought he would not dare to refuse her her freedom. It was so manifestly her right. She must be free to go to New York, and pursue the inquiry madam was to have undertaken. How could Helmer be cleared unless some one went to watch the negro? Now things must remain as they were.

"It was unjust of madam to leave it thus," she cried, and then she reproached herself for the thought.

Death had overtaken madam suddenly, or she would never have left her younger son unprovided for. But had she done so? Was it possible that she could have been so remiss? Since Geysbert was capable of such deceit and hardness, was there anything worse of which he was not capable?

Not even to Ryseck did Aveline tell her disappointment, but the good woman's eyes served her on occasion, and once or twice, after they had rested on Aveline, they turned to follow Geysbert with a look which said that the redoubtable Ryseck would not have been averse to giving the young man a further taste of the sharpness of her tongue.

Probity and Aveline worked together with wonderful unanimity. Probity was sorry for Aveline, and now that she was never called upon to watch friendly advances towards her from Geysbert, she could afford to be magnanimous. After that last encounter, Geysbert avoided Aveline as much as possible. He was wise enough to desire to let the ill feeling blow over. It hurt him to quarrel with her, but he would rather quarrel with her, and meet her anger, than feel her indifference. He was no less in love with her than before. It seemed as if his love grew faster than ever in the unpropitious soil of strife. There was no generosity in the love, but there was passion enough to keep Geysbert's soul hot, and to drive him on determinately in the course he had undertaken.

The manor house was very desolate to Aveline now that madam was gone. The June sunshine, when it came, could not give the place its old warm, cheery look. She would gladly have turned her back on it, since it held for her only sorrow. She was ready to echo Ryseck's words, when one morning she met the good woman on the stairs.

"What is coming to the house?" demanded Ryseck.

"Surely there's nothing in it but vexation and harassing."

Aveline smiled sadly.

"There should be satisfaction in it to you," she said, "for you have at least the knowledge that you help keep it straight for others."

"Straight! Did anything ever keep straight in this crooked world?" responded Ryseck. "And did trouble ever fail to come where you least expected it? Who'd have supposed that Philip Schredel would turn that helpless or childish that he couldn't hold a pipe between his lips when he was dead asleep as well as when he was awake? Sure enough he must be stricken with sickness or death, to fail in an act so simple."

"Has aught of harm resulted?" asked Aveline, an amused smile for a moment playing on her lips.

"Harm enough," responded Ryseck. "When did fire ever refuse to burn? It did but burn a hole through the bed-clothes as large as the bowl of his great pipe. But it is not the hole which troubles me so much as the mischief it portends. Surely nothing but sickness could make the man thus helpless, and truly his head was that heavy this morning that he could hardly hold it up. To think that he could not keep the pipe between his teeth in his sleep, when to my certain knowledge it's never been out of his mouth day or night, except when he's been eating or drinking, or otherwise specially employed, since he and I were married. He's gone to sleep with it there as regularly as he's gone to his bed, and the smell of it, when he's woke up and lighted it in the night, and fallen asleep again with it all snug between his teeth, has been as natural to me as sleep itself. And now to think he should drop it from his mouth in the night, and never know a thing about it. It is sickness coming, of a surety."

Ryseck was not far wrong. Sickness had overtaken

Philip, and though he was not dangerously ill, the good woman had her hands full. That the worthy Dutchman was no gentle patient Ryseck's sharpened tongue testified. Many duties devolved upon the two girls in consequence of her attendance on her husband, and Aveline was very tired when, on a certain warm June night, she sat upon the piazza and thought of madam and Helmer. Where Helmer was now she did not know. He had deemed it unsafe to communicate with her at present. How would it all end? Would he ever be cleared? What was he doing to-night?

As if in answer to her thought, a childish voice from out the darkness whispered in terrified tones: "Oh, missy — Missy Av'line! He's *dead!*"

The face of Tyte appeared, and even in the dim light Aveline could see upon it the look of horror. The boy sprang upon the piazza, and dropped on the floor by her feet, rocking himself to and fro in his excitement.

"Mars'r Helmer! Oh, Mars'r Helmer!" he moaned.

"Hush!" said Aveline authoritatively. "Are you sure?"

"No, missy," said Tyte wofully.

"Tyte," said Aveline, clutching the boy's shoulder, "get up and tell me what you mean."

Tyte rose and faced her, pressing up against her. He even laid his hand on her arm. Tyte had, for the moment, forgotten all his good behaviour.

"Who told you?" asked Aveline, in a low voice.

"Nobody. I — missy — I see him."

The grasp of the boy's fingers tightened. He looked fearfully over his shoulder.

"Where?"

"In de forest, right up under de mountain. Oh, Mars'r Helmer! Mars'r Helmer!"

The scene he had witnessed had so manifestly taken hold of the imagination of the boy, that its horror com-

municated itself to Aveline. She hardly doubted Tyte's assertion. It was so real to him, and the worst was always happening now.

"How do you know he was dead?" she asked.

"He look dead. Mars'r Helmer never look like dat when he was alive."

"Did you touch him?"

Tyte shook his head. Aveline felt the shudder that went through his frame at the question.

"Missy, no. I dassent. He look so *dead*."

"What did you do?"

"Stand jest inside de tepee for a minute, and look at him, layin' all dead — and den — and den — I run, and Mars'r Helmer's face run too, all de way in de gaderin' dark. It look at me out of de trees, and trough de bushes — dead!"

The last word was wailed out in a tone that sent a thrill through Aveline's heart.

"Was he wounded?" she asked.

"Dere no blood, missy, — noting only his dead face, and him layin' stretched on de groun'."

"He has murdered him!"

Aveline's thought had sprung to Arent Hooghland. Then a more terrible possibility presented itself. Had Geysbert and Helmer met, and was that dead face the sole record of what had followed? She tried to throw off the horror, and to obtain more definite information.

"How far were you in the forest?" she asked.

"A long way, missy. Up on de side of de mountain."

"Were there any more tepees?"

"Tree more. Rufe and me go huntin'. He go on, and I stop by de tepee," said Tyte.

"Rufe was with you," interposed Aveline. "Then he saw Mr. Helmer?"

"No, missy. He go on. I go in de tepee, jest for

to see inside. And den — den — Mars'r Helmer's face scare me, and I run."

"How long ago was that?" asked Aveline.

"De dark come 'fore I get out of de forest," said Tyte.

The boy still trembled. His eyes were rolling with fear. For a minute Aveline did not speak. She was thinking rapidly. Was Helmer really dead? There might yet be life left. Tyte was not sure. In his frightened haste he might have mistaken sleep for death. Something must be done, and she must do it. There was nobody else upon whom to depend. Ryseck was engrossed with Philip, and if she were not, it would not be safe for her to go.

"Tyte," said Aveline, "I am going to Mr. Helmer, and you must go with me to show me the way."

"No, missy! Not now," said Tyte. "Not in de dark!"

His voice rose in shrill appeal.

"What, you would leave Mr. Helmer to die — you, his own boy?"

Aveline spoke reproachfully. A sob burst from Tyte's lips.

"He *is* dead, missy, layin' dere in de tepee."

"I don't believe he is dead," said Aveline firmly. "I am going to him as soon as I can get what I need to take with me. I want you to carry the basket."

Tyte's hand was still on her arm. He swayed backwards and forwards in his terror.

"Missy, don't!" he said. "Not in de dark."

Aveline looked at the boy for a moment. His fear was becoming uncontrollable. She wrenched her arm free, and put both her hands on his shoulders.

"Tyte," she said, "I thought you loved Mr. Helmer. You do not. He is in need — dying — and you will not go to help him. Go home. I do not want you."

You are not Mr. Helmer's boy. You leave him to die."

She released him, and went towards the door.

"Missy! Missy Aveline!"

"Well?" Her voice was cold.

"Dis boy will go. Dere's death spirits in dat forest to-night, but Tyte is goin' to Mars'r Helmer if dey *kill* him."

Aveline turned. There had come a quick revulsion of feeling.

"Tyte, you and I will go," she said. "It is for Mr. Helmer. Wait for me out beyond the buildings. I shall not be long."

She went into the house. Her brain was on fire, but her heart was cold. Helmer dead! It was as likely to be true as false. But true or false she would see for herself. There was no one else free to go. Free! Aveline stood still just where she was. The word darted through her brain like a lightning flash. It revealed to her the situation. She was the only one of the whole household who was *not* free. She had no legal right to go to Helmer, or to stir one step beyond the door of the manor house. She belonged to Geysbert, and she knew what answer he would give should she ask his consent to her expedition. She was in bondage, bound by law to do the will of her master. And that master was Geysbert. She had no right to leave his house, even for an hour, without his permission — no right to save Helmer's life, were it possible that it could be saved. She stood stunned. Her face had grown white and hard. It was the bitterest moment of her servitude. She was bound. She was not at liberty to go to Helmer.

Slowly the necessity for movement forced itself upon her and she went upstairs. At the top she stopped a second time. Her face softened. The deadly white-

ness disappeared, and tears glistened in her eyes. Her heart was beating naturally again.

"I am bound to do service for dear madam," she said. "The freedom of that service is mine. I am free to serve — nay, I am *bound* to serve. I am going to Helmer — in madam's service."

Not half an hour later Aveline stood in Philip Schredel's room.

"Ryseck," she said, "I have a duty to perform for madam. It may keep me away from the manor house for a time, but it is such that madam herself would have commanded me to do it. I go to serve her, and when that service is ended I will return."

Ryseck looked at her amazed.

"You are going away now?" she asked.

"Hush! I did not say so. But if it should be so, for madam's sake you will wait for my return. You can trust me, Ryseck, can't you?"

Ryseck looked at her for a minute without speaking.

"Aye," she said at last, "I can."

The girl's lip quivered, and she turned hastily away.

"Do you want aught to take with you?" asked Ryseck.

"I have all I need."

She went towards the door, came back and threw her arms about Ryseck's neck, and was gone.

The good woman did not follow her. Ryseck was discreet.

It was not less than five miles from the manor house to the spot from which Tyte had fled that afternoon.

The trail ran along the mountain side, ascending as it went. It was a rough, uneven bridle-path, here and there passing dangerously near to the edge of steep, rocky ledges, that in the darkness seemed to dip down to great depths. Tyte's fear showed itself in loud gasps, as he pressed close to Aveline. She was not without

fear herself. This part of the forest was very wild and lonely, and savage beasts lurked in the shelter of the underbrush. There was none of the hope that had been in her heart when she braved the loneliness of the woods before. Then she was going to communicate with Helmer — now it was, perchance, a dead Helmer that she was to meet.

"You are sure you are going right, Tyte?" she said.

"Yes, missy."

Tyte's voice shook. He was shaking from head to foot.

"Look, missy! Mars'r Helmer's face!"

His words rose to a shriek. He pointed to an opening in the trees. The moonlight shone through an oval space, about the size of a man's head.

"Nonsense," said Aveline, "that is no face. Go on. We shall soon be with Mr. Helmer, and you will then have nothing to fear."

Her own heart beat irregularly, in spite of her words. It was weird and gruesome here, on the edge of the mountain, and at dead of night, and the errand was more weird than the road.

"Dere, missy. Yonder's de tepee."

Tyte stood still. His legs refused to carry him nearer to the horror he had seen in that deserted Indian habitation. It was right before them, about thirty yards away.

"Come!" said Aveline, but Tyte drew back. When she left him, however, he sprang after her.

"No, missy. Don't go widout me."

They reached the opening of the tepee together. Then Tyte fell back. He had not courage to enter. Aveline stepped inside.

Tyte was right. Upon the floor lay a motionless figure. It was too dark to see that figure clearly, but Aveline did not doubt that it was Helmer. Her trem-

bling hands for a long time refused to aid her in procuring a light. She tried again and again. Then a spark fell, and the lantern was alight. Until then Aveline had forced her eyes to keep away from the form extended upon the floor. Now she lifted the lantern.

"Helmer!" she cried, and was on her knees by his side in a moment.

It looked like a dead face. It was no wonder Tyte was afraid. Her own heart was afraid too, fearful that there was no more service to render.

"Helmer! Oh, Helmer!" she moaned.

A quiver, the slightest possible, stirred the eyelids. Aveline sprang to her feet.

"He is not dead," she cried, and hastened to take restoratives from the basket.

It was long before he opened his eyes. When he did so, a feeble smile broke over his face. Then he roused himself, but it was to utter no words of welcome.

"Go! he said. "You have no business to be here. Go! Do not touch me."

She looked at him reproachfully.

"Helmer," she said gently, "do you not know me? It is I — Aveline."

She would have taken his hand, but he drew it away. The effort was almost beyond his strength. He lifted his eyes to her face. They were clearer now, and his tongue was more under his control. The restoratives were taking effect.

"Dear — you must go," he said. "It is small-pox. You will catch it."

"Is that all?" she asked, and her eyes smiled into his. "I am not afraid. But I will keep Tyte away."

She went to the door.

"Tyte," she said, "we've saved him. He is not dead. But you must not come in, or you will take the small-pox. Go you into the nearest tepee. It is close, and

you can hear our voices. See, I will bring the lantern in, and you shall make sure that the place is empty."

When she had disposed of Tyte, she came back. Helmer was trying to rise, but his strength was insufficient.

"You are very ill," she said. "You must lie still."

She sat on the floor by his side, and took his head in her lap, her hand caressing it as it lay.

"How long have you been here?" she asked.

"I do not know. A long time, I think. The disease had run its course, and I was getting better. It was at no time so bad that I could not take a certain amount of care of myself. But my provisions had failed, and I was too weak to procure more — and — I was starving. That was all."

"Helmer!"

She was on her feet in a moment, putting his head tenderly back on the old bear-skin upon which he lay. He was very weak, so weak that Aveline was frightened. She fed him like a child, and he lay smiling at her like one; and when the early morning light crept in through the doorway of the tepee, they were both surprised to see it.

CHAPTER XXXIII

WITH returning day Tyte's fears vanished. Mars'r Helmer was alive, and he and Missy Av'line and Tyte were in the forest together. Tyte loved the freedom of the woods, and his capers were irrepressible when he learned that he was to stay to assist Missy Av'line. Tyte held his head high. Mars'r Helmer might have been dead now, if he had not brought Missy Av'line to the rescue. He was very active, cutting off boughs to make a bed for Helmer, and bringing in enough small game to supply his own wants and Aveline's.

Aveline stoutly refused to allow him to enter the tepee where Helmer lay. She would brave the disease herself, but she would not allow Tyte to do so. She was busy that first day preparing her camp. She appropriated one empty tepee for storehouse and headquarters for herself, and before evening came had done much to add to Helmer's comfort. He wanted her to stay all day by his side. It was better than food, to watch her, he declared. She shook her head.

"Happiness alone is too light a diet," she said. "It must be interspersed with something more substantial."

He was gaining strength already. Aveline was glad that her basket had been a large one, and well packed. She guarded its contents jealously. Had she been a little farther from the manor house, she would have felt happier. She could not altogether rid herself of the fear that Geysbert would institute a search for her. She knew that her absence would cause no small disturbance, but if she had witnessed Geysbert's anger when he learned

that she was gone, her fears might have had a more definite foundation.

Probity did not grow decidedly anxious about her till mid-day. Then, as she did not appear, she concluded that her supposition of a visit to some neighbour was wide of the mark.

It was Geysbert who summoned Ryseck.

"Where is Miss Aveline?" he asked peremptorily.

"Just what I was going to ask you, sir," replied that good woman, looking him fairly in the face. "You're master here, and it's more likely to be deed of yours that is keeping her from the manor house than anything else."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Geysbert, turning on her fiercely.

"What I say. Ryseck Schredel never means aught less."

"You had better beware, woman," shouted Geysbert. "Your insolence is unbearable."

"Maybe the truth *is* unbearable," replied Ryseck coolly. "But somebody has got to tell it. And when you're about it, you may as well hear a little more. It won't hurt you, I'll wager. If you'd heard it earlier and oftener, you'd maybe have had a heart less hard."

"What is it you are driving at?" demanded Geysbert fiercely. "Say what you have to say and done with it. Where is Aveline, and what have you to do with her absence?"

"I don't know where she is, poor lass," said Ryseck, "but I know where she ought to be. She ought to be with that brother of hers, as free to go and come as Mistress Probity here. If anybody's earned the right, it's that maid. And for her to be forced, because she's denied her freedom, to take things into her own hands if she needs to be away a few days or weeks from the manor house, says little for the son of the father and

mother she nursed and cared for as if they had been her own."

"Who told you she ever asked for her freedom?" inquired Geysbert wrathfully. "Whatever conversation she had with me on the subject was surely private, and concerned none but myself and her. What right have you to know of it, far less to interfere?"

"Who told me? My own sense. I've got a little, and it took but a little to read that poor maid's sorrow. Truly this is the first time the story has been told in words. Right glad I am you've said it in good plain Dutch. It brings it home to everybody to have it put into speech."

Geysbert's answer was a round Dutch oath. Probity's eyes grew dark with disapproval.

"Cousin Geysbert," she said, "the tongue of a good man will not dip itself in evil. Verily such words are a sin."

"I'm not a good man," replied Geysbert, with an angry laugh. "I grant you the words were not fit for your ears."

"And of the facts, cousin? Does Ryseck speak truth?"

"That I choose not to give away a possession that is mine by legal right? Yes. It *is* truth."

He spoke defiantly.

"And what of moral right? Surely it seems to me that in this case justice is against you, cousin."

"You are all against me," he said. "Yet in spite of you all, I will find Aveline, aye, and bring her back."

His passion was again mastering him. He turned to Ryseck.

"Speak!" he cried. "Tell me all you know about her, or I'll take measures that shall bring even you to terms."

"I doubt not that your measures will be worthy of you," said Ryseck.

"Ryseck," interposed Probity quietly, though the colour which came and went in her face showed that the calmness did but extend to externals, "it seems to me that you forget both your relation to my cousin, and the duty you owe your own soul. Such bitterness of speech is unseemly, and in one in the position in which you stand, surely a lapse of duty."

"Bitterness, say you, Mistress Probity? It is as sweet as the language which called it forth. And it is not more bitter than the lot of that poor child. If you want to set your eyes on bitterness, look at the bitter injustice of that."

"I put aside your recrimination," said Probity. "Will you do me the favour to tell me all you know of Aveline's movements."

"Aye, and that is quickly told. I do not know whether she is in the manor house or not, for I have not looked. But I know that she told me she might have a duty to perform for madam, and if it should keep her away for a time, she would return when it was accomplished."

"When did she tell you this?" demanded Geysbert.

"Last night."

"She has gone to New York on that fool's errand, the clearing of Helmer," he said. "A boat passed here late in the afternoon. Ten to one she joined it at Kingston."

"You will let her go?" questioned Probity.

"That will I *not*."

He went out, and they saw him no more that day. But when he had visited Kingston at Esopus, and learned that Aveline had not joined the boat there, he was at a loss. He returned through the woods. There was in his heart a fear that she had lost her way, and might be

wandering there. The news that Tyte, too, was missing, greeted him on his return.

"Then her absence is accounted for," he said. "That rascal knows the forests almost as well as an Indian. It would not be impossible that she should have embarked below Esopus."

His mood was more savage than when he started.

"She owes it to me to return, and return she shall," he said.

"What will you do, cousin?" asked Probity.

"Do? Go after her, and bring her back."

"But you will not be harsh with her?"

His laugh, at least, was harsh.

"You are pleased to think me a brute," he said.

It was on the fourth evening after Aveline's departure that Geysbert stepped from the door of the manor house. His heart was on fire with bitter impatience, and the quiet of the evening hour was distasteful to him. He had poured out a brimming horn of rum, and tossed it down his throat. It steadied his nerves.

Aveline could have aimed no heavier blow at Geysbert than in thus leaving his protection. True, the law would give him the right to bring her back, by force, if necessary, and would leave her subsequent fate in his hands. There was little comfort, however, in that thought. Aveline's act brought out forcibly the relation between them. He understood, as he had never done before, how completely she belonged to his brother, and the thought exasperated him. To-morrow, he had resolved, he would start for New York.

"The sun is growing tired, but the white brother rests not."

The face of the Indian squaw who spoke broadened into a grin at sight of the young man. The visitor had visions of hospitality in connection with the manor house. She had timed her visit so as to turn those visions into

realities. The brooms with which her back was burdened were fewer in number than when she traversed the forest in early morning. She had visited several white people's dwellings since then, being wise enough to make the manor house the last on her round. The Indian squaw was well known on the Feljer estate, and her brooms, made by splitting birch blocks into slender filaments, were in great request.

"Ah, Karanondo," said Geysbert indifferently. "You are late with your brooms."

"Yes," she replied, speaking Dutch easily, "Karanondo is late, but she has gone far. She is not lazy, like the white squaw up in the tepee."

"What white squaw?"

Geysbert was not indifferent now.

Karanondo pointed upwards, towards the mountain.

"Yonder," she said. "It takes many tepees for few people. One tepee for sick white man, one for white squaw, and one for black negro rascal."

Geysbert's hand was clenched, so that the nails hurt the flesh. He restrained his tongue, even after the squaw relapsed into silence.

"Did you pass there this morning?" he asked, and he fought hard for such composure as should leave him unbetrayed to the keen eyes of the squaw.

"When the sun was waking," was the answer.

"The old tepees on the edge of the mountain?"

Karanondo nodded.

"And you sold some brooms up yonder, did you?" asked Geysbert, in a tone of affected indifference.

A broad grin illumined the squaw's face.

"They want no brooms in tepee," she said. "They all asleep."

Geysbert laughed.

"Well, how many brooms have you?" he asked.

He bought the rest of her stock, and when he paid her, he gave her a small present besides.

"Don't let your tongue wag further about the white man in the tepee," he said significantly. "Karanondo is wise."

She nodded and grunted.

"Karanondo is wise," she said, and looked at him steadily. Then she turned away to deliver her brooms. The manor house and a good meal were the next items in the programme.

Geysbert strode to the barn. His brain was on fire. Aveline was with Helmer. The thought maddened him. He set his teeth together. At that moment he hated his brother as he had never hated human being before.

Towards Aveline his heart was hard. She had defied him, left his home, gone to Helmer. That was the crowning offence. He did not stop to think. There was at no one moment the slightest irresolution. He was saddling for himself a horse, the fastest of them all. When he was ready to mount he led it round to the house, and entering, drank another horn of rum. He set the horn down, hesitated, partially filled, and drained it again. Then he strode through the kitchen. Ryseck was there, and he accosted her. She held a pewter bottle in her hand, the same she had brandished in Philip's face when she grew eloquent over Geysbert's sins.

"I have cause to go up the mountain," he said. "I shall not be back till late."

"As you say," replied Ryseck.

"Oh, and you may as well give me that bottle. It will serve me well."

Ryseck looked at him closely. "Better have less to do with bottles," she said, but she handed it to him. He returned to the sideboard, and filled it with rum, taking another draught himself before going out.

His brain had been on fire before, and his deep drinking had not cooled it, though it had answered the purpose of taking away his nervousness. His hand no longer shook, as it had done when he saddled his horse. He sprang upon the animal's back, rode a few steps, and then drew rein. An object had caught his eye. It was a coil of rope lying conveniently near. He stooped low and reached it, placing it on the saddle before him.

"It may prove useful," he said aloud, and ended with a savage laugh.

As he turned from the broad road that passed the manor house, Helmer's dog Kip perceived him, and came bounding towards him. Kip had been disconsolate since Aveline's departure. He had sought her up and down the premises, and his eyes had grown wistful and sad. Either he was to-night especially lonely, or he connected Geysbert's late ride with Aveline, for he followed persistently.

"Go back with you!" commanded Geysbert, but Kip only dropped behind, and followed at a distance.

At first Geysbert rode fast, but as he entered the forest he slackened speed, and let his horse walk. He was allowing the bitterness of his anger to gather strength, brooding in dangerous silence. The sun was down before he came to that part of the way where the path narrowed along a rocky ledge, where was a dip sheer into the ravine below. It was a picturesque spot, with the shadows gathering about it on this June evening, but it would have been a dangerous one if his horse had not proved trustworthy. That passed, he put the animal to a canter, and made good progress over the rough track, Kip going ahead.

When the last ray of sunlight had touched the tops of the trees beyond the camp, and twilight was deepening, Aveline left the tepee where Helmer was asleep, and

set out to bring water from the mountain stream a few yards below. She lifted her head, and drank in the soft June air eagerly. It was very free and fresh up here. As she stooped at the stream, something came bounding towards her.

"Kip! Dear old Kip!" she cried.

The dog overwhelmed her with caresses. He was frantic with joy. He had hunted for her so persistently, and he had found her at last.

"Gently, Kip," she said, as she put him aside to look down the mountain path. From where she stood she could see it more than half a mile below, and in spite of the gathering gloom she perceived a horseman. For one moment her heart failed her. It seemed to contract, as if to choke her. Then with an effort she turned, and walked quickly up towards the tepee.

"Tyte," she called softly.

"Yes, missy."

"Yonder is Mr. Geysbert. Do not let him see you. He will be angry, and you know what that may mean. Go and hide until he is gone. And be sure not to tell Mr. Helmer; it would worry him. I am going to meet Mr. Geysbert."

"Yes, missy," said Tyte, in an awe-struck tone. "He'll be angry, sure."

At that moment Kip uttered a sharp whine, and started for the tepee. He had made a discovery which sent his longing heart into raptures of joy. But, alas! Ave-line's voice called him back.

"No, no, Kip. Not yet," she said. "He is there, but you must not go in."

She put her arms about the dog's neck. If Helmer saw Kip, he would guess that his brother was coming. Her one object was to prevent them from meeting.

"Dear, good Kip, come!" she said.

The dog hesitated, whined mournfully, and followed

her. As soon as she was out of sight of the tepee she quickened her steps to a run. She must meet Geysbert as far away from the camp as possible. She was standing in the middle of the path when he saw her — waiting for him.

"You are here!" he said, and the sound came from between his closed teeth.

"Yes. I am here."

She lifted her face to his. The evening light fell upon it, and the beauty of it smote him. He leant forward, bending towards her.

"Come back," he said, "and I will forgive you."

It was not what he had meant to say, but it was forced from him.

"When my work is done, I will come," she replied calmly. "I have no intention of defrauding you, Geysbert Feljer."

"You will come now," he rejoined, and the softer look vanished from his face.

"That will I not."

"I demand it."

"And I refuse."

"You refuse to return with me, your — master?"

The last word was spoken doubtfully. Aveline's eyes flashed, but she answered steadily and quietly.

"I refuse to return with you — my master."

"You are not free to refuse," he said, striving after a calmness that should rival her own.

"I am not free — no. Yet my very bondage is here my excuse. It is bondage and freedom in one. I am free to serve her whom I am *bound* to serve. I am to-day in the service of madam — my mistress."

"Nay, you came to serve that outcast — that murderer — Helmer Feljer."

"As you will," she said.

His calmness was vanishing.

"You claim to be free," he said, "yet in the eyes of the law have you no right to quit my service. Of this I warn you."

"I claim to be free to serve any of madam's family, and most of all the one who needs me most," she said.

"Then serve me. I need you more than any other. Serve me, and I swear it shall be serving Helmer too."

She understood him, and shook her head.

"Do you know why I came?" she asked.

"To care for *him*," he said bitterly.

"Did you know he was ill?"

"Not till to-day."

"It might well have been death, instead of sickness," she said, "it came so near."

"A pity it were not," he replied.

She looked at him, startled. Then her face hardened.

"You think so?" she said. "Then we are little likely to agree."

"No, we are little likely to agree," he replied, and his eyes flashed dangerously. "But we are likely to bring this contest to an end. If you will not come of your own free will, you must come without it."

He sprang from his horse as he spoke, and before she had divined his intent, he swooped down upon her, lifted her as if she had been a baby, and tossed her up on the back of his horse. The movement took her by surprise, yet she was too quick for him. As his hold relaxed, she gave a sudden jerk, and slid down on the other side. Then she turned and confronted him.

"Coward!" she said, "to lay hands on a woman. It is well your father is in his grave. He has at least been spared the pain of such disgrace."

He felt the scorn in her voice, and it stung him. He stood glowering at her. Then his passion burst out afresh.

"*You* talk of disgrace," he said. "*You* ! And that after running from your duty to seek the company of a homeless wanderer, a murderer, curse him ! "

"Your curse will return on your own head," said Aveline hotly. "And as for the title you give your brother, you come nearer meriting it yourself, with your raging passion, than ever he has done."

She stood looking into his face, her own alight with indignation and scorn. It would not be true to say that she felt no fear for her personal safety. It was evident that Geysbert had been drinking, and she divined the object of his drinking. In such condition Geysbert Feljer was not a pleasant companion, nor a safe one. Yet at that moment scorn was stronger than fear. It was the reality of the contempt that gave it force, and sent it home to the drink-numbed brain of the young man. It aroused him to wilder jealousy.

He *must* make an impression on this girl who defied alike his love and his anger. He *would* make that impression, let the consequences be what they might. She should feel his power, though she scorned his affection. To do him justice, he hardly knew what he said. He was beside himself with rage and jealousy. He turned upon her.

"Get you upon that horse," he cried, "and return to your duty. I will have no bond-servant of mine attending upon a murderer and a beggar. As for him — he shall get his deserts."

"When deserts are dealt out, it is you who will need to fear," said Aveline. "As for returning with you, I tell you plainly I will not."

"And I say you shall."

He advanced, as if to lift her a second time in his arms, but she evaded him, and stood a short distance off, facing him again.

"Go your way, and sleep off the effects of the drink

you have taken, and then, if there be any manhood left in you, you will think better of this," she said imperiously. "As for me, I shall do my duty as your mother herself would have bidden me. Your brother's life depends on the care he receives."

She turned from him, and took a step in the direction of the tepee. That step was a mistake. The moment her back was turned, her influence over Geysbert was lessened. She heard him following, and before she could look round she felt his arm about her waist.

"There shall be an end of this," he said. "I will let you know who is master."

"Do your worst, Geysbert Feljer," she said, turning again. "I will never ride behind you."

"Nay, jade, that you shall not. I swear it. You shall take the place that belongs to you, and run behind your master."

Rage and jealousy and drink combined, had done their work. Geysbert had lost all control of himself. He seized the rope which lay upon the saddle, and with blind fury flung a noose over her head, drawing it tight about her waist. Then, still holding her hands, which he had grasped when she turned towards him, he took a shorter and thinner rope from his pocket and twisted it about her wrists, binding them close together, regardless of how the rope cut into the soft flesh.

"There, slave, now learn to obey your master," he hissed in her ear, and mounting his horse, while still holding the end of the longer rope, he dug his heels into the animal's sides.

The pretty creature bounded into the air, and then started at a rapid pace. For a moment the rope hung loosely, then it tightened, and Aveline was dragged to the ground. She repressed the cry which rose to her lips. Even now her first thought was of Helmer. He

must know nothing of this. For him to witness such a scene would mean death to one of the brothers.

Kip was less thoughtful. He uttered a short angry snarl, and sprang towards Aveline, biting and tugging at the tightened rope which dragged her mercilessly along the path, fortunately here grassy and soft. Aveline struggled to regain her feet, but the horse was going too fast. Kip gave vent to a sharp yelp of fear. That cry aroused Geysbert to a sense of danger. Even in his drunken fury he had no desire to kill Aveline. Mad jealousy had urged him to show his power, but now, in the moment of victory, he had just sense enough left to prompt him to a measure of moderation. He reined in his horse and brought it to a walk. Then he looked back. The sight of that heap on the path gave him a feeling of savage pleasure. This was his revenge. It was sweet to his wounded pride. Aveline would never dare to disobey him again. It would be a salutary lesson. As he looked he saw a movement in that dragging object. By a great effort the girl sprang to her feet. The moon, which had risen, shone on her white face. The sight of it frightened him. He must have something to keep up his courage. He had set out to subdue this girl, to establish his authority over her, and these fears, which assailed him unbidden, must be thrust away. He raised Ryseck's bottle to his lips, and took a long, deep draught. Then, as the warmth ran through his veins, he looked back again.

"Now do you know who is your master, wench?" he asked.

There was no answer, except a low growl from Kip. The dog was racing round Aveline in vain attempts to free her from the rope. Geysbert laughed sardonically.

"What? You are not subdued yet?" he said.

He shook the reins on his horse's neck. The obedi-

ent animal started into a canter, and he turned his attention to the path before him.

Aveline exerted all her strength to keep up with the horse. The pace was not as fast as before, but she knew the race could not last long. The path had become rocky and uneven. To be dragged upon it would mean death. She was bruised and shaken already, though not seriously hurt. But now the track grew more rugged at every turn. One misstep, and not her own life alone, but possibly Helmer's also, would be the price. Her brain worked fast. There was a dark piece of road ahead, a terrible piece of road. She remembered it well. Rough rocks cropped up in the way, and overhanging trees made it dark and gloomy, so that the feet might well stumble. There were tree trunks, too, overturned and rotting, encroaching on the narrow path, and farther on the road became a mere shelf on the edge of the ledge. Below the shelf the rock dipped sheer down for seventy feet and more. Terror of that spot was upon her. She dropped her hands down before her. Then a thought came. In the pocket of her apron was a knife, one that had been Helmer's gift. Her finger-tips could almost touch it. She bent forward as she ran, and succeeded in getting it between her fingers. To lift it to her mouth, and then hold it in her teeth and saw through the rope which bound her wrists, was a work requiring time and caution. Luckily, Geysbert was riding more slowly now, and at last the work was done, but not before one wrist was badly gashed and bleeding. Then she slowly loosened the noose which held her, and slipped it over her head. She was free, but she was not safe. Geysbert would feel the sudden loss of weight, should she relax her hold on the rope. She held it firmly, pulling upon it that he might not perceive that she was no longer a prisoner.

Presently she raised her head, and her eye fell on a patch of light some distance ahead. The light revealed a short log, lying so near to the middle of the path that it seemed not impossible to touch it as she passed. The sight of it gave her an inspiration. Could she reach that log, and have time to slip the rope around it? If so, it might be made to take her place. She put forth all her strength to gain on the horse. Two or three moments would suffice. The exertion caused the veins to stand out on her forehead. It seemed to her that she was not even holding her own. But bit by bit she gained. The rope was slack. She was almost opposite the log. With a final effort she darted to one side, slipped the noose over the end, and pushed it under the log until her fingers were crushed and bleeding. There was a quick jerk, a hitch, and then the log moved off with a thump. Aveline dropped down into a clump of bushes. Kip stopped too.

"No, no, Kip! Good, unselfish Kip, you must go," said Aveline, in a low, pleading tone. "He will see you, and think that all is as before. Go! Oh, go!"

She put her hand on his head, and pointed after the retreating horse. Kip understood. He looked wistfully in her face, put his big tongue to it, and raced after the horseman.

The road grew dark with the shadow of the trees. Geysbert found it necessary to ride cautiously. The rum was taking effect. His brain became momentarily cloudier, but as it did so, his desire for revenge increased.

"You'll defy me, will you — and for him?" he muttered. "Aye, for him! It'll take a lesson to teach you — but I'll do it. Get up there! Show the stuff you're made of."

He twisted the rope into the harness, and gave the horse a sharp cut with his whip, at the same moment

glancing over his shoulder at the dark body upon the road in the shadow behind. The horse started, stepped upon a loose stone, swerved, and the next moment there was a sharp human-sounding cry, and the creature was pulled back upon its haunches. The rider looked round to see the rope tightened to its utmost tension, and hanging over into the ravine. The horse struggled and tried to move forward, and the rope, that was stretched over a sharp, jagged edge of rock, swayed and strained.

“Ho! Stand still there!”

A pang of fear shot through Geysbert's heart. Aveline? Where was she? He looked in horror at the tightened rope. She was hanging at the other end of it, dangling over the precipice. His face was distorted with fear, and great drops stood out on his forehead. He hastily dismounted, but agitation, and the effects of his potations, made him stagger. He put his hand on the horse's neck to steady himself. The excited creature, thinking he meant to incite her to fresh efforts, sprang forward again. The rope strained and creaked, the sharp edges of the rock cutting into it more deeply. Geysbert was thrown to the ground.

“Ho, you brute! Stand still, I tell you!”

The horse obeyed. Geysbert regained his feet, and staggered to the edge of the cliff. What he saw there took away the last vestige of self-control. A single strand of rope was left. The rest was cut through. While he was looking at it, horror overpowering him, it parted, drawing itself out for an instant. Then there was a dull thud, and the crashing sound of a heavy object breaking its way down into the ravine. He stood staring into the dark abyss, dazed, helpless. The dog was gone. After that one fearful cry there had come no other from below.

“Aveline!”

The voice was hoarse. Geysbert bent over the precipice. Then he drew back hastily. An uncontrollable terror was cutting its way into the dazed brain. Aveline was dead, and he had killed her. He stood listening, but there came no answer. In a frenzy of fear he fled towards his horse, putting his hand on the warm flesh. In doing so, he touched the pewter bottle, not yet drained. With a low cry he clutched it, though his trembling hand almost refused to raise it to his lips. When he took his lips from the bottle, it was empty. Once again, in the strength of that draught, he went to the edge of the ravine, flinging himself on the ground, and peering over.

"Aveline! Aveline!" he called, but the silence mocked him. He turned back and mounted his horse. The wise animal did the rest. When she stopped before the door of the barn, her master lay a helpless weight on her neck, clutching her mane in his stiffened hand. A rope dragged at her heels — a rope stained with blood.

The manor house was asleep, even to the negro whose duty it was to stay up to attend to Geysbert's horse. But he was asleep in the barn, and the door was open. The sagacious animal stepped inside, and stopped by the stall she claimed as her own. Then she waited for her master to dismount. More than once, in the hours that followed, she impatiently pawed the ground. She deemed that her resting time was being encroached upon. At last she gave a low whinny of appeal, shaking her neck impatiently. The shake and the whinny both had effect, the first in dislodging the sleeping man, the second in reaching Probity's ears. The girl stepped into the barn just as Geysbert, half-roused, slipped heavily to the floor. Probity had been anxious and restless that night. She had tried to sleep, and failed. Geysbert's absence worried her. Hours ago she thought she heard the step of a horse, but all had been silent

since, and Geysbert had not come in. Now the first faint streak of light was in the sky. She could keep quiet no longer. She rose, and stole softly out. As she reached the barn she heard the whinny of the horse, and was in time to see Geysbert collapse, a helpless heap, on the floor.

"Geysbert! Cousin Geysbert!"

He looked up in stupid surprise. Above them, in the hay, the negro snored loudly.

"Where have you been, cousin," asked Probity gently, "and why are you so late?"

"Late?" He looked at her again. His hand slowly travelled to his head.

"She is dead!" he said. "I've done for her."

"Whom? What do you mean?"

Probity's eyes grew deep with horror. Was her cousin simply raving, or had there indeed been a tragedy enacted in the darkness?

The horse, freed from its burden, was impatient to enter the stall, before which Probity stood. Feeling that strong measures were necessary, it gently rubbed its head against her shoulder. She turned, stepped aside, and saw the rope. The next thing Probity did was to light a lantern, and examine that rope. It was yet wet, and when she touched it she drew back her hands with a suppressed cry. They were red with blood.

"Geysbert, dear Geysbert, what does it mean?"

She turned to her cousin again, but he was fast asleep. She shook him, and called to him, but to no purpose. Then she returned to the horse. The trailing rope, jagged and ragged at the end, fascinated and horrified her. She felt as if she could not touch it. But when there came a sound from above, as if the negro were waking, she hastily approached it again. Quickly, and with skilful hands, she removed the saddle from the horse, and unfastened the rope. As she lifted the saddle, a bit

of woollen rag caught her eye. She took it in her hand. It was a scrap of a woman's dress. For many minutes after that Probity stood as if stunned. Her hand closed about the scrap of woollen cloth, and her heart grew cold. At last she turned, put away the saddle, and carefully gathered up the rope. The dawn had not yet broken. Probity gave one long look at her cousin as she passed. Then she left the barn. It was half an hour later when she entered the manor house, and before she did so, a ragged length of rope sank into the waters of the Hudson, far out in the middle of the channel.

CHAPTER XXXIV

AT precisely the usual hour Probity sat down to breakfast — alone.

“Better not wait for Mr. Geysbert. He’s taking his night’s rest in the barn — in the morning,” said Ryseck drily. So much she had learned from the negroes.

“No. I was not thinking of waiting.”

Probity put a few finishing touches to the table, and sat down. She even forced herself to eat. Unrestrained emotion was in Probity’s eyes a sign of the lack of that self-discipline which was part, and a large part, of the duty of man. The food did not choke her. But when she lifted the cup to her lips, she set it back again hastily. There was a weight resting on her, and pressing her down — the weight of a terrible tragedy, and of a sin. The sin was her own. The memory of that rope, washed clean by the water of the river, was heavy on her conscience. Justice was crying aloud, upbraiding her with having sought to cover a crime. And she pleaded guilty. Love for her cousin, the desire to shield him from the consequences of an act which she did not understand, but of which she suspected the worst, had quickened her steps, and nerved the arm that had consigned the criminating rope to a safe burial. Now, when the deed was done, she quailed before the sharp thrusts of conscience.

“To allow natural affection to defraud justice, and turn away from the evil-doer the rightful punishment of his crime, is to be partaker of his deed, and to commit heinous sin,” said that well-trained mentor.

Probity did not deny the conclusion. She was not

inclined to turn away the punishment of her own sin. She looked the sin in the face, and acknowledged it. It was hers — Probity Thaxter's. Her integrity had failed. Love for her cousin Geysbert had been weighed together with the principle of a life, and by the side of love, principle had been light. Probity had ever loved justice, but there had come a time when she loved her cousin better. She stood up before herself a condemned sinner. And yet, in spite of the condemnation, she was not sorry that the rope could tell no tales. If at that moment Probity had again stood by Geysbert's horse, and fixed her horrified eyes on the damp frayed evidence of a violent deed, that evidence would have been left to do its work of crimination. Probity would have entered the manor house and left it where it hung — a proof of her cousin's guilt. So far the convictions of her soul had reasserted their sway. But she had not reached the point at which she desired to stand again at the parting of the ways, and have a chance to keep her feet in the path of rectitude. She was humiliated and sorrowful over her own failure, oppressed with a sense of guilt, and yet — at heart — relieved that the rope was hidden.

She went about her duties abstractedly, in the constant presence of an accusing conscience and a great dread. She did not seek Geysbert. She knew that until he had slept off the effects of his last night's drinking, he would be in no fit state to explain. She watched for him anxiously. When he came she would be faithful, all the more faithful that she had already proved her own weakness. But when it drew on towards noon, and he did not appear, Probity turned her steps toward the barn.

"Mars'r Geysbert? No, missy. He went away to the forest as soon as he was awake."

"How long was that ago?" she asked.

"Not long, missy. No. Not many minutes."

Gone to the forest, to look on the scene of his crime. Probity walked slowly away, but when she was out of sight of the negro, she quickened her pace. And she too turned in the direction of the forest.

There was a dark cloud between the sun and the ravine when Geysbert left the mountain path, and scrambled down below the ledge, at a spot where the rock was less precipitous than immediately beyond. The blackness of that cloud was in accordance with the feeling of Geysbert's heart. His mind was hardly yet clear, but memory had come back enough to torture him. His first thought, when his half-stupefied brain so far took in the surroundings as to tell him that he had not slept in his bed at the manor house, was of that terrified cry out on the mountain road the night before. He sat up, and with labour struggled to his feet. That cry? What had it meant? Where was Aveline? Dead, down there in the ravine? Great drops broke out on his forehead. He brushed them away with his hand. What had he done in his drunken passion? How far had he gone? Was this thing a nightmare, born of his too free association with Ryseck's pewter bottle? He shook his head. Then a thought came to him. He went to the stall where his horse stood. The affectionate animal whinnied, but his hand offered her no caress. He was looking for a rope, a frayed rope. It was not there. His hand went up to his head. Who had unsaddled his horse? He asked the question of the negro who had peacefully passed his night in the hay overhead.

"Nobody but yourself, mars'r," replied the man boldly. "And you tell me to go to bed, and I go."

Geysbert examined the saddle. It was in its proper place, and it bore no mark of anything unusual. There was no rope there, to all appearance never had been. Was it indeed a dream?

The dull, stupefied brain gradually cleared, and memory brought back, bit by bit, in a dim, unreal fashion, the doings of the night before. And then, under the influence of a deadly terror, Geysbert started for the mountain path. What had he done? He did not know. He was not sure. Aveline might be yet alive — down there in the ravine.

The recklessness with which he crashed through underbrush and scattered rocks might have cost him more than the scratches and bruises of which he was hardly aware. He was bent on getting to the bottom, and he cared little about the consequences. Once there, he pushed his way along until he stood under the steepest point of the mountain path, and looked up to the sharp, jagged rock where last night — if his brain were not playing him false — a tightened rope had held by one strand. He stood staring at that ledge. Then he began to climb. Just above him was a rock shelf, broken in places, and crumbling. Its position was such that it might well have arrested the fall of a heavy object from above. His heart stood still as he neared it, and looked beyond it to where, overhead, the heavy rocks frowned beneath the shadow of the thick storm cloud. When he balanced himself on a heap of broken stone, and brought himself to a level with that lower rock shelf, a sharp cry escaped his lips.

"Blood! Hers! And it is wet!"

The words were low — very low. His fingers touched the stained rock. Great clots of blood were lying upon it. Geysbert shuddered, swayed, and lost his footing, slipping down to where a girl stood looking up at him.

"Are you hurt, cousin?"

"What? You here?"

"Yes. I saw you ahead of me, and I followed."

Probity's voice was very clear and quiet. Her eyes were searching Geysbert's face.

"The mischief you did!"

"The mischief lies not there, cousin."

Probity spoke solemnly.

"What do you mean? What do you know of mischief?"

"Not as much as you can tell me, truly, but enough to destroy my peace, and to show me that the house of Feljer has indeed fallen, since on my cousin's soul lies a sin at thought of which my own heart recoils."

"You speak foolishness," said Geysbert. "My brain is not clear enough for riddle-guessing. Tell me plainly of what you speak, and I may perchance understand you."

"Where is Aveline?" asked Probity suddenly.

Geysbert started and recoiled, his lips moving involuntarily.

"You ask me more than I can answer," he said, after a perceptible pause.

"And yet you met her last night."

"You have no proof of that."

He spoke fiercely. Probity's eyes were fixed on his face.

"What is there on that ledge?" she asked.

Again he faltered. He drew himself together with a manifest effort.

"Dirt and rubbish principally," he said, with an unnatural laugh.

Before he had finished speaking, Probity had sprung lightly up the rock-strewn slope.

"I would see for myself," she said.

"Come back! You'll break your neck."

"I will return when I have inspected the ledge," said Probity calmly and emphatically.

"You will return now. Truly your interference is unbearable."

He was at her side, but not before she had, for a

single moment, raised her head above the level of the shelf. She allowed Geysbert to lead her down.

"Whence came that blood, cousin?"

"Blood? Who says it is blood?"

"Is it not?"

"You are enough to drive a man wild with your questions," he said.

"Cousin, where is Aveline, and why did you return last night with a rope tied to your horse's saddle — a rope blood-stained and frayed? Aye, and why did you tell me you had done for her, and she was dead? Did you allude to her — to Aveline?"

"I was drunk," he said, and broke away from her with a groan. He went crashing through the bushes in wild haste, anywhere, away from the blood-stained rock and Probit's accusing voice.

And before he had gone out of hearing the storm broke, a summer shower, heavy and wild. It beat down on Probit's unprotected head, and on the rock shelf where the blood — poor Kip's blood, shed for his master — lay hardening in the hot air. When the storm had passed, the rock was clean again, and if, as might well be the case, the hungry wolf that had torn the heart of the faithful dog — that loving heart which had bidden him obey the girl his master had commanded him to serve — if that wolf returned later to lick up the last remnants of the feast, he found only the hard, dry stone.

The log, which in falling over the edge of the rock had hurled the dog from the path, and with one blow battered out his life, lay far below in a hollow of the ravine, covered by bushes, and unnoticed. Probit knew nothing of it. She stood in the rain, the heavy drops coming down upon her — stood with bowed head.

"Forgive! Forgive him — and me."

Her lips were moving, but the words were only a murmur. Between Probit's soul and peace was the memory

of that hidden rope. Yes, and of the blood-stained rock. The witness of both was confirmed by her cousin's behaviour. Probity had little doubt that Aveline was dead — slain by Geysbert's hand. And yet, at that moment, her thought was not with the victim, but with the slayer. She recognized the fact with shame and fear.

The storm had passed, and the sun shone out. Probity lifted her head. The water ran in streams from the rocks. They were slippery beneath her feet, but she slowly climbed again to the spot from which Geysbert had hurried her. She drew a long breath as she reached it. It was clean. But her soul and Geysbert's were stained.

CHAPTER XXXV

"**H**AS the world gone sheer crazy?" cried Ryseck Schredel. "Mistress Probity, where have you been, and in such a storm too? Drenched to the skin you are, I'll answer for it.

"I have shaken my clothes, and they have dried somewhat. I think they will now leave no marks, Ryseck," said Probity quietly. "Yes, truly I was wet, for the storm was heavy."

She passed Ryseck, and went upstairs. Then methodically she removed each article of wet clothing. She was not thinking of the clothes. She was filled with the consciousness that the knowledge of her cousin's crime rested between himself and her. The very rain of heaven had come to the rescue, and washed away the evidence of the deed. It was but necessary to keep silence, and Geysbert would be safe.

"It rests between him and me," she said slowly, "aye, and it rests *on* him and me, and there it will rest for all eternity, unless it be confessed, and the just punishment borne."

She made no attempt to put the conviction from her. She had too long accustomed herself to face her own heart to turn coward now.

"I have sorely sinned, yes, and am still sinning," she admitted, "for not yet can I crush this unholy affection, and obey the voice of my conscience. If he were of us, of the household of the just, and had thus failed, he would know that no scourging could be too grievous if it might bring him back to the path of right. Better die as a — murderer," she forced her tongue to say the word aloud, "than destroy the soul by a hidden crime.

But he is not of us," she continued. "His hope is in this world, and if it be taken from him, — and by my hand, — what has he left?"

All day she went about the house, keeping her hands employed, while her ears listened for Geysbert's step. And through the hours the strong protest of her conscience went on. Love and duty were struggling together, and every moment love grew despairingly stronger. It refused to yield, even to the mandate of a trained and hitherto all-conquering conscience.

To Probity the thought of covering a sin, of deliberately defrauding justice, and allowing the sinner to live as though he had not sinned, was a grievous offence. Geysbert had fallen, and justice required that he should suffer the legal penalty of his crime. And right required of her that she should not shield him, nay, under the circumstances, that she should denounce him. Had there been another who was in a position to do it, it might have been that the terrible necessity would not have rested upon her. But now, in the face of her own act, which had made it impossible that any other should accuse him, it was her duty to do so. She had arrived at the point where she acknowledged the duty.

"It ought to be done. It is required of me, Probity Thaxter, to do it," she said. "But I am not prepared to obey. I am saying no to my God and to my conscience, and — I can say no other."

Her head drooped in shame and sorrow. Her love was too strong for her convictions.

It was very late that night when Geysbert returned. The house was still. He thought that all were sleeping, but Probity was not asleep. She came out of the large room which always seemed to him full of his mother's presence. To-night the thought of his mother was but an added torment.

"Dear Geysbert, you are late, and you must be faint — and suffering."

She came up to him, and laid her hand on his arm. The light of the candle she carried showed the sympathy in her face.

"You know nothing of suffering. You are a saint," he said.

He pushed past her up the stairs, and she heard him fasten the door of his room. There were tears in her eyes as she followed slowly. Her words had brought him no comfort. She ought not to have expected it. She entered her room, and knelt. She was trying to pray — for herself and him, but she could not. Between her and comfort, as between her and hope of succour, was a sin, hers and his. She might not comfort him. She had no right. She was partaker of his sin. And she could not pray for him, for, to her, prayer seemed a mockery. What answer could she expect? Surely not one of peace. That would be to lower the throne of justice, to make the eternal decrees as weak as human hearts. To Probity, right, and justice, and eternal good, and peace, and succour, were on one side, and on the other, herself and Geysbert. Between lay the martyrdom embodied in that act which she felt was required of her, the giving up of Geysbert into the hands of the law, and the witnessing of his death as a murderer.

It was no wonder she did not sleep. Sleep was as far from her eyes, and rest from her soul, as they were from the eyes and the soul of her cousin. His brain had thrown off the numbness engendered by the drink, and set itself free to think. He had no clear recollection of the scenes of the previous night. But there was a confused memory of harsh words and a cruel purpose towards the girl whom now, in his bitter remorse, he loved more passionately than ever. Her face, as he

saw it when he looked back, and the moonlight fell upon it, was before him still. That, and the cry which had awakened him from his drunken barbarity, were the two clear points in the midst of indistinct memory. He had been hurrying away from these two all day, and had never outdistanced them. Now they waited for him, his companions for the night. He had nothing to do but hold fellowship with them.

He could not get up a counter irritation against his brother. That feeling had died out, passed out of sight in the overwhelming horror that possessed him. He had called Helmer a murderer, and as such his anger had been hot against him. But his worst conception of his brother's deed could not approach in cruelty that of which he was guilty. And it was certain that he was guilty. There *was* a doubt about Helmer.

He had suddenly grown lenient. The term murderer did not burst forth as bitterly from his lips. He knew how it felt to be a murderer. And it never occurred to him to talk of the injustice of the murderer going free. He realized that the words were an absurdity. He could not go free. The murder had hold of him.

After he broke away from Probita that morning, Geysbert at first fled recklessly, not caring whither he went. But presently his feet began to pick their way. He worked upward and outward, and came on the edge of the mountain. Then he began to descend. He was making for the Indian tepees. Not with the view of doing injury to Helmer. That had faded from his mind. It was rather an indistinct idea, a vague notion of expiation, that led him there. Aveline had said something about her presence being necessary to Helmer's recovery. If that were so, he might at least carry on her work, save the life she had risked her own to succour. It was not love for his brother that turned his feet towards the tepees, but a remorseful desire to

prevent Aveline's work from being in vain. In this attempt also there was an utter absence of comfort. The Indian tepees were deserted. There was not a sound to be heard in the camp.

"I might have known better. The boy Tyte was with him. Doubtless he has removed him farther into the forest, for fear of me," he said bitterly. "His life may pay for the move, if he be indeed as ill as she said."

For a long time he stood by the camp, then he went slowly over the ground he had traversed in the moonlight. The rain had obliterated every trace of a struggle. Again he searched the ravine. She might be there yet, though the blood upon the rock pointed to the work of some wild beast. He searched diligently for trace of her, and found none. It was not until after darkness had descended that he left the ravine, and, hardly knowing what he did, turned homeward. Except when Probity's questions had startled him for the moment into a consciousness of danger, he had no thought of his own position. When the accusing voice ceased, the consciousness was obliterated by the more pressing horror of remorse. His thought was all of Aveline. When, therefore, as he opened his door in the early morning, he saw Probity awaiting him, he was not at first as profoundly impressed by her words as she had anticipated.

"Cousin," she said, "I have this night striven against my God. Truly for man thus to strive is vain. I am vanquished. Yet am I still a rebel. I yield, not to the force of truth, but to the pressure of alarm lest my contumacy should cost my cousin his soul. A rebel still, I obey the right."

Her voice was low. It thrilled with emotion. Its tone arrested Geysbert's wandering attention.

"What do you mean?" he said. "You had better

leave me and my sins alone. They are too black for you."

"Geysbert," she said, and her face, as she drew nearer to him, was so white that it forced him to put aside for the moment his own dark thoughts, "it is more than plucking out the right eye that is required of me. To deliver up myself were a small matter. Against the delivering of my cousin to justice—and death—I have fought, yes, impiously fought. Now I go to accomplish it."

He looked at her for a moment, bewildered.

"You will betray me?" he said, and there was more surprise than fear in his tone.

"Aye, I must."

It was almost a wail.

"As you please," he replied. "I think I care little. I warn you, however, that I shall not criminate myself. I have not your scruples to contend with."

The depth of sorrow in her eyes touched him, even then. He put both hands on her shoulders.

"It costs almost as much to be a saint as to be a sinner," he said. "Do your worst—or your best, for so I suppose it seems to you. I will face it."

To her surprise his lips touched her forehead. Directly after, he gently put her aside, and went down the stairs.

Probity returned to her room, and stood by the window. The morning light revealed the weariness of her face. It bore the marks of exhaustion, as of one who had struggled till strength failed. The girl's hands hung limp and nerveless. She had wrought herself up to the point of supreme effort. To announce to her cousin her intention of delivering him to justice had seemed to her a physical impossibility. Her tongue absolutely refused the office. But she compelled it to the task. Now the words were spoken. She had

entered upon the course to which conscience called her. Yet she was not at peace. She was an unwilling servant. She had yielded to conscience the obedience of a slave, driven by the lash of fear. Not that the worst fear was for herself. It was not to ease her conscience that she had surrendered. The condemnation yet rested on her spirit. It had been in no wise removed. She and right were yet opposed. She wished to rebel, though she obeyed. But persistency in hiding her cousin's sin meant to her the loss of his soul, and in that loss she would have a hand. If she did not speak, justice could not overtake him. On his soul would rest an unacknowledged sin that would sink him to hell. The sin must be confessed, and her tongue must confess it, since his would not.

The signs of her struggle were so apparent, that when, in the afternoon of the same day, the second step of that forced duty was taken, and Probity entered a house in the small town of Kingston, the grave face of the elderly Dutch gentleman before whom she presented herself softened at sight of her. There was such a depth of sorrow in her eyes that the voice which had often struck terror to the hearts of evil-doers was very gentle as he asked :

"What is your pleasure, my child? Can I do aught to serve you?"

"Sir," said Probity, "I understand that you are one of those appointed in this province to judge your fellow-men."

There was the faintest approach to a smile on his lips as he bowed in response.

"I have much to say to you," she continued. "I pray you to hear me patiently."

"Then if you have much to say, sit you down," he replied kindly.

Philip Vanderbeeck was a man who could be stern on

occasion, but there was no trace of sternness in his manner as he added:

"Now, if you are ready, I will listen."

"My name is Probity Thaxter," she said, "and I belong not to the province of New York, but to the New England colonies. I have for many months dwelt at the Feljer manor house, where I came to visit my aunt, Madam Feljer, who now is no more."

The face of her listener changed. He leant forward, and his manner grew still more attentive.

"My aunt had in her service a young girl, a bond-servant," continued Probity. "She was to her almost as a daughter, and was allowed much liberty."

She looked at him inquiringly. She wanted to be sure that he was following her.

"I understand. And your trouble is connected with her?"

"With her and my cousin Geysbert, my aunt's eldest son."

Probity's voice faltered. She stopped a moment, and then went on steadily.

"After my aunt's death this maid left the manor house—without permission. She claimed to have a duty to perform for my aunt, and I think it probable that she spoke the truth. My aunt trusted her much."

"Was she worthy of trust?"

The interruption was made more for the sake of giving the speaker time, than from a desire for further information. Probity had spoken quietly—too quietly. Her calmness was so manifestly the result of strong self-repression, that it awakened Philip Vanderbeeck's sympathy.

"I think she was. Yet, in my opinion, she was misguided. My cousin Geysbert was angry at her disappearance. He had reason to suppose that she had

gone to New York, and he was about to seek her there. He is passionate, and he was unduly angry."

Again Probity paused. The pallor of her face increased.

"The story is hard for you to tell. Rest awhile, or perhaps I can supply some of it myself," said her listener considerably. "Does not your trouble lie in the thought that this girl has been too harshly treated by your cousin? He has perhaps unduly and unlawfully punished her, and your sympathies are aroused."

"My poor cousin! Nay, I fear that my sympathies are yet with him, in spite of his sin. But I may not hide the crime. I dare not run the risk of allowing her death, unconfessed, to lie upon his soul."

"Her death!"

Probity rose suddenly, and stood before him.

"Sir, I fear it is so," she said. "I would I could think otherwise."

"This is a serious charge to bring against the son of Wyntie Feljer. And it is strange that one of his own family should prefer it."

Philip Vanderbeeck spoke sternly.

"The choice lay not with me," said the girl, in a low, deep voice. "There was none other who knew. As one who had tried to destroy the evidence of his guilt, I was constrained to speak. I had put it out of the power of any other to bring righteous punishment upon him. In my desire to shield him I had forgotten the soul that could be destroyed by my weakness. There was but one thing to be done. I was clearly called upon to make his guilt known. Yet for a day and a night I strove against the duty."

She lifted her eyes to her listener's face, and for a minute stood quite still before him. In that minute he realized something of the conflict through which she had passed. It was impossible to look into her face without

realizing it. And while he looked, he ceased to wonder. It would have been strange that such information should be given by one so near, and evidently so much in sympathy with the accused, had not that one been Probity Thaxter; but it would have been stranger still if this girl who stood before him had refrained from speaking.

"I understand. You act from a sense of duty," he said.

"Of necessity, sir, imperative necessity, lest his soul should be the price of my silence."

"You spoke of destroying the evidence of the crime. What was that evidence?" asked Philip Vanderbeeck.

Then, in a clear, low voice that thrilled her hearer, Probity told the story of the night which had seemed to bring life — as she knew it before — to an end, and of the day which followed. Her account was singularly free from those comments to which, in his position of Justice, Philip Vanderbeeck was accustomed to listen. This girl went straight to the point, and stayed there. In a wonderfully short time he was in possession of the facts, and had learned the significance of the frayed rope and the blood-stained rock.

In his capacity as Judge, Philip Vanderbeeck had never listened to a story that touched him so deeply. The strong, but admirably controlled emotion of the speaker gave life and reality to her words. He was strangely sympathetic towards this girl. And yet it was not altogether strange. He remembered the time when a little energetic Dutch maiden held his heart in her keeping. Ah, that was long ago, and she became Wyntie Feljer instead of Wyntie Vanderbeeck, but all through this sorrowful story he saw the face of the young Dutch maid, and the thought that the life of Wyntie Feljer's son was at stake made him quick to see the weak points in the accusation. Instinctively, when

Probity ceased speaking, he began to question her. His voice assumed a judicial tone.

"Had you any reason to suppose that this girl was in the neighbourhood of the manor house?" he asked.

"None whatever."

"On the contrary, it seemed to you more reasonable that she should be in New York?"

"Very much more. I cannot account for her leaving the manor house, except to go to New York," said Probity.

"Was it likely that she would go to the city and return at once?"

"No, sir. Very unlikely."

"Then your sole reason for supposing that harm has come to her lies in the words your cousin addressed to you?"

"Yes. I had no other means of judging."

"Do you think that at that time your cousin was in a condition to be held responsible for his words?"

Probity looked at him inquiringly.

"Sir," she said, "he was intoxicated."

"Will you tell me just how much you mean by that term?" he asked.

"Sir," she said, "is there any better limit of the word than that given in our old Plymouth colony law? 'By drunkenness is understood a person that either lisps or falters in his speech by reason of much drink, or that staggers in his going, or that cannot follow his calling.' Truly my cousin faltered in his speech by reason of much drink, and he did not merely stagger, but fall in a heap by the side of his horse, and he was unable even to rid the beast of its harness."

In spite of the gravity of the occasion, a smile hovered about the lips of the Justice.

"The words of a drunken man are often foolish, and sometimes meaningless," he said, "yet taken in con-

junction with the blood and the torn rope, they are suspicious. Of themselves, however, I doubt whether they present much evidence."

Probity's startled eyes were fixed on his face. For the first time in the interview her calmness seemed to be failing her.

"Sir, oh, sir," she said, "give me no false hope. You know not how my heart clutches at it."

"You would rather keep in the dead calm of despair, where hope and fear do not contend?" he said kindly. "Poor child! Your devotion to duty is costing you much suffering. Yet I think that in this case you have rather unwarrantably jumped to conclusions. There are many suspicious circumstances, but, in my estimation, little real evidence that your cousin has committed a crime. There, there, child," he added hastily, as he took her hand in his, and gently forced her into a chair, "sit down and take comfort. You have put too great a strain upon yourself."

The hand he held was limp and cold. For the time, the calm, self-reliant Probity had vanished. It was a pitiful, suffering face that lifted itself to his.

"Sir," she said, "it cannot be as you think, or why is my cousin so remorseful, so unlike himself?"

He shook his head. "That I cannot tell you, yet it may well be that he is not so great a culprit as you deem him." Then, after a short silence, he added, "If it were as you think, this would be a case for the Supreme Court. Am I mistaken in thinking you came to me that the responsibility might be taken off your shoulders?"

"I thought that, as a Judge, you would know what to do," she said. "I would do what is right, for his sake."

"Will you leave the matter in my hands?" he asked. "I have a little more legal knowledge than yourself, I think."

He was smiling again now.

"Sir, I should be very thankful to do so."

"Then I will come to-morrow and see the place of which you speak — this ravine. And I will speak with your cousin. He knows nothing, I suppose, of your coming?"

"I am not sure. He was away when I started. But he will not be surprised. I told him in what direction my duty lay."

"You told him that you were about to inform against him?"

"Surely, sir. It was but just so to do."

He looked at her curiously.

"And he? What did he say?"

"He told me to do as I saw best. Sir, he was very good to me."

Her voice broke, and her eyes grew dim.

"And he was not alarmed?"

"He did not seem to be so. He said he should defend himself."

"That is strong presumptive evidence that he is not guilty," said Philip Vanderbeeck cheerfully. "Well, my dear, there is no more to be done to-day. To-morrow I will see you at the manor house."

"You are very kind to me," said Probity simply. "I thank you."

She left the house, comforted, and hastened to the river, where her attendants awaited her with the boat. It was late when she reached the landing, and she was surprised to see Geysbert looking for her. He held out his hand to assist her.

"I had grown anxious about you," he said, "though, to be sure, these rascals are equal to bringing you back safely."

He gave a word of command to the negroes, and turned up the path with her.

"Cousin, it was good of you to come to meet me."

There were tears in Probity's voice. Her self-control was giving way. The long strain was proving too much even for her trained will.

"We may as well be good to each other," he said. "We are neither of us any too happy."

He did not enter the house with her, nor ask her of her doings, and she saw him no more that night. She did not know what time he came in, for she slept the sleep of sheer exhaustion. Attempts at rigid self-examination were useless that night. Probity had lost the power of judging, not others only, but herself. Brain and body and heart were wearied past bearing. They peremptorily refused to be driven farther. In defiance of her protests, the sleep of exhaustion seized upon her, and questionings of her own conduct and of her cousin's ceased. When she awoke she put the questions from her. She had to take up the dropped duties of the household, and she felt that there was but strength left for the one set of responsibilities. Ryseck exclaimed at sight of her face.

"What are things coming to?" she said. "Surely madam's presence was never so much needed as now. There, there, child, get you to your breakfast. When you're as old as I am, you'll have learned that the man that's worth a good woman's breaking her heart over, must be a very extraordinary one indeed."

Ryseck had her own opinion about the cause of the present peculiar condition of affairs at the manor house. The evident excitement was explainable on her hypothesis, and she sympathized with Probity.

"Breaking her heart over a lad that has never an eye for her!" she said impatiently.

In the afternoon of that day Probity was summoned to meet Philip Vanderbeeck. He greeted her with a smile.

"I have seen your cousin," he said, "and visited the place of which you told me. I think you need trouble yourself no farther on the point of being called upon to institute proceedings against him. There is but a very slight foundation for your suspicions, and though I cannot altogether set your mind at rest, I believe this to be a case where it would be wisest to exercise that charity which thinketh no evil. Your cousin admits there are circumstances connected with that night which he does not wish to explain, or feel called upon to explain, unless the law should force him, in which case he thinks he can dispose of the matter satisfactorily. He is at a loss to understand where you obtained your impression, unless it be, as you say, from words spoken by himself when in a state of disgraceful drunkenness. He has no memory of them, and but an indistinct recollection of anything which happened that night. As for the rope, he justly says that its presence in the hands of one who is by instinct a hunter, is not to be harshly construed. Such a rope might easily be stained with blood, without it being necessary to suppose that human blood had been shed. On the whole, my dear, I think he has the best of the argument," said the kind-hearted Judge, "and I would advise you to dismiss the subject from your mind. It seems to me that the worst you could do would but lead to a harassing trial, at which there would be insufficient evidence to convict. The girl may be beyond the province before now. It is almost impossible to find out whether she be dead or alive. Better let the matter rest."

She looked at him long and searchingly. Because she wanted to believe, she held back.

"I know not how to thank you, sir," she said. "I am in perplexity about the matter. Yet surely you should know better than myself."

"I have had more experience," he said.

"Yes. I ought, perhaps, to trust to it. My aunt averred that I trusted too much to my own judgment. It is possibly true."

"That may well be, my dear," he said, and there was a twinkle in his eye.

"I will seek guidance on the subject," continued Probit. "But in the meantime my heart is full of thankfulness to you for your sympathy and your help. I would fain express my gratitude, but I seem to have no words in which to speak."

"It is unnecessary, my child," he replied. "Wyntie Feljer's niece should command my services, even if in yourself I had found nothing to awaken my sympathy."

He would not stay, though she pressed him. He took both her hands in his.

"Patience is a virtue that should be cultivated at the present time, I think," he said. "Patience in judgment and in action. Good-by. Don't quarrel with your cousin."

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE almost human cry which burst from poor Kip at the moment when the falling log swept him over into the ravine, that cry which had haunted Geysbert ever since, had been carried by the wind away from Aveline. It reached her, however, in a subdued form, bringing with it a renewed sense of danger. When she dropped behind the bushes she at first lay exhausted, listening to the hoof-beats of Geysbert's horse. Now she roused herself, and rose, staggering, to her feet. Geysbert might find out the substitution and return, and yet — she did not think he would. The rum he had taken must produce effect before long, and when it did, it would insure inaction for many hours.

She became suddenly aware of the blood that was trickling from her wrist, and she wrapped her handkerchief about the wound. Strength seemed to have left her limbs; she was trembling violently. She stood still to recover breath for that upward climb to the tepee. It was terribly long and steep. She was but just beginning to realize the danger through which she had passed, and that which lay ahead. It was the thought of the danger to Helmer which overcame the weakness of her shaking limbs. She drew her forces together and began the ascent. He must not know of what had happened, at least to-night. To-morrow, by daybreak, he should be removed farther into the forest, where Geysbert could not so easily find him. But to-night she would hide everything from him.

She passed the cut and jagged rope that had been wound around her wrists, and then, she hardly knew why, turned and picked it up, slipping it into her pocket.

The intense excitement which had hitherto carried her through was passing away, and exhaustion gained upon her. Her feet dragged heavily, and the pain of the bruises made itself felt. She began to realize Geysbert's brutality, and the authority he had over her. Indignation was, however, stronger than fear.

"Missy! Missy Av'line!"

Tyte's voice sounded from among the trees. The sigh of relief with which Aveline turned towards the boy showed how great was the effort she was making.

"Tyte," she said, "come here. I want you to help me up the hill."

"Missy — missy isn't hurt?"

Tyte sprang towards her. His eyes looked up at her in the moonlight. When he saw the whiteness of her face he said, "Mars'r Geysbert *drunk*, or he never hurt missy, not when he worst angry."

She put her hand on his shoulder, and leant on him.

"You must not tell Mr. Helmer — not a word," she said.

"No, missy. Dis boy know better."

They reached the camp, and Aveline looked in upon Helmer. He was still asleep, and she went to her own tepee. She must throw off this weakness, or Helmer would discover what had happened. His eyes would be even sharper than Tyte's.

It was not easy to throw it off. The shock had been great. She felt a numbness creeping over her, and tried to rouse herself. The next moment she was fully roused, and that without effort of her own. The silence of the forest was again invaded; through the door of the tepee had come the sound of voices. There was no room for doubt. Some one was near. Was Geysbert returning with another — possibly Arent Hooghland?

She forgot her hurts, and went swiftly outside. It

could not be Geysbert, for the sounds came from above. She stood upon the track waiting. The voices had ceased, but now and again the cracking of a twig told that the intruders approached.

Then two figures emerged from the shadow. Aveline's heart beat heavily. Who were they, and what was their errand? They came nearer, the taller in advance of his companion. The moonlight revealed his face to her as she stood motionless.

"Fulke!" she cried, and tried to run to meet him, but the treacherous strength suddenly gave way.

"Aveline! Why, child, what are you doing here?"

His arm was about her, and he was looking into her white face. Her lips moved, but no sound came. Then he saw the bandaged wrist, and his own face paled. He gathered her up in his arms and carried her towards the tepees.

"Not dere," suddenly interposed Tyte's voice, as Fulke would have taken her into the one where Helmer slept. "Missy be sorry if Mars'r Helmer see her now. Missy say not to let him know."

Tyte guided the way to Aveline's especial part of the camp. Fulke carried her inside, and peremptorily ordered the boy out. Then, his professional instincts asserting themselves, he proceeded, by the light of the lantern, to bind up the wounded wrist more effectually, and to examine the bruises on Aveline's arm.

"There's something wrong here," he said, and he set his lips together closely. "It is time somebody looked after her, poor child."

"Oh, Fulke, I am so glad!"

Aveline opened her eyes. She made a great effort, but the words were only a whisper.

"There, lie still. Glad? So am I."

He bent over her to alter her position. She gave a sharp cry of pain.

"What is it? Where are you hurt?" he asked anxiously.

"All over, I think. To be dragged behind a horse is calculated to inflict *some* injuries."

She spoke indignantly, if feebly.

"You were riding, and were thrown?"

"No."

Her lips quivered. She was yet too much unnerved to give him a clear account of what had occurred.

"There, never mind," he said gently. "I am afraid you are injured more seriously than I thought."

"No, I am only bruised and scratched," she said. "It came near being worse. It would have been, if he had carried out his madness."

"He?"

"Yes. Geysbert Feljer."

Fulke's brow grew dark, but he restrained himself. Aveline was in no fit state to be agitated further. The way in which he listened to the story, as it came in disconnected sentences, was possibly the best proof he could have given of the disciplinary effect of his present self-reliant life.

"We shall see," he said, and his tone was ominously calm. "I think I may promise you your freedom now, child. Geysbert Feljer may be a brute, but even brutes believe in self-preservation, and self-preservation just now requires the going through a little legal process that shall alter the relations between a certain much-abused girl and his own precious self."

Aveline hesitated. The thought of discomfiting Gysbert was inviting, but she remembered Helmer. Any triumph for her would be paid for at his expense.

"Geysbert deserves it," she said. "And truly he has put himself in our power. His act must surely have been a breach of the law, though he claims he

has all authority over me. Yet it would be dangerous to push him too far. Helmer's life is at stake."

Aveline had not seen Fulke since Geysbert's journey to New York, and she had much to explain. Through the early summer months he had been away among distant tribes of Indians, seeking to prove to them that it was more to their interest to come and trade at Albany than to go to the French traders of Canada. He had had some success, and was now on his way to a village of the Five Nations, there to look after certain recreant hunters.

"I came far out of my course to pay you a hurried visit," he said. "I had had no news of you for long, and was anxious. It was well I came. The manor house is no fit place for you now."

When Helmer awoke it was to see Fulke watching beside him.

"You have changed nurses," said Fulke quietly. "My sister is resting."

He found Helmer on the high road to recovery.

"It would not hurt you to be moved," he said. "I think I shall take you along with me. Before the journey is over you will be well, that is, if we make it long enough."

He did not speak of Geysbert's visit, but he intimated that he had heard rumours which convinced him it would be wiser to make a move in the early morning.

"You will not lose your nurse," he said. "I am going to keep my sister with me, and settle the matter with Geysbert later on."

After that explanation Helmer offered no objection to the plan.

Fulke had not abandoned his project of calling Geysbert to account for his dealings with Aveline; he had only postponed it. He could see good reasons for delay. He had had a long talk with Aveline, and as a result, the

early morning saw the camp deserted. With the help of his Indian guide, Fulke constructed a litter, and the two carried Helmer far enough that day to remove all danger of a second visit from Geysbert. It was not until many days later that Helmer learned why the hurried move was made. When he saw the rope — stained and cut — which had bound Aveline's wrists, his face grew very white.

"Will it ever be possible to make up to you for the wrong we Feljers have done you?" he said.

CHAPTER XXXVII

“COUSIN GEYSBERT!”

A week had passed since Justice Vanderbeeck's visit. There were dark lines about Probity's eyes, and a sorrowful droop to her lips. She was not the Probity of the past, even of the more recent days since madam's death. Peace had not returned to her heart. She had come to the conclusion that, so far as justice was concerned, her duty towards her cousin was accomplished. But the consciousness of a crime, and of her own part in concealing it, was always present.

Geysbert had been very gentle towards her. He felt no inclination to resent her action. His heart was in too great a tumult of remorse to feel the full force of that act. He met her the same night, and stopped to speak to her.

“Well, is it even between us?” he said kindly. “You have had your way, and your conscience should be at peace.”

“Nay, my cousin,” she replied sadly, “the shame and sorrow of a sin yet rest upon it. My heart clung to the evil, and in its fellowship I must still live. It may be that in time it will be purged away. But to throw from me now the pain of that sin, to trick my heart into believing that it has accepted the higher will because that will at the present demands no supreme sacrifice, is to cheat myself. Nay, I look not for peace, nor do I deserve it.”

He shook his head.

“You go too deep for me,” he said. “Enough for me if I escape those sins the sting of which your innocence knows nothing of. But you are not going to shut

against me that much-tried heart of yours, are you? I think you are about my last friend now."

"Cousin, if I had loved you less, I should have sinned less," she said.

He looked into her face as she lifted it towards him. From that moment he never again told himself that Probity's eyes were passionless.

The next morning Geysbert appeared at the usual hour for breakfast. Since that night ride he had taken no meals with his cousin, but now the manor house fell into its old ways, or new ways, for it was very silent and sad without Aveline.

Ryseck alone was at her ease. Philip had recovered, and Ryseck was in no wise uneasy about Aveline. She noted the signs of suffering in Geysbert, and nodded her head complacently.

"Serves him right. He's getting a taste of his punishment, and he finds it bitter in his mouth," she said. "He may take away his brother's possession, aye, and his character, but he cannot take that lass from him. She's too much for Geysbert, bless her, and he knows it, and the knowledge goes hard with him."

The signs of suffering were very apparent. The week that had passed had not dimmed the memory of that sharp cry, nor driven from Geysbert's eyes the picture of Aveline's white face. They went with him everywhere. The nights were worse than the days, for then they claimed his undivided attention. Possibly that was why he was so late in coming in to-night. Probity had long been waiting for him. Now, as he entered, she met him in the hall.

"Cousin Geysbert!" she said.

He looked up wearily. If she had not spoken he would have passed her.

"Will it be a sorrow to you to know that my father requires my presence?" she asked.

There was the slightest quiver in her voice. It might or might not be a sorrow to Geysbert, it was undoubtedly a deep sorrow to Probity.

"You are going from us?"

Unconsciously he used the last word. It was hard to remember that he was alone.

"It is my father's command."

"Ah! You had a letter from him to-day. I had forgotten the fact."

A light sigh parted Probity's lips. She had not failed to notice that what was of so much interest to herself had slipped from his memory almost instantly.

"And you are really going?"

There was sorrow in his tone now — unmistakable sorrow.

"It is a grief to me," she said.

"And what is it to me? You are the last. The manor house will be desolate when you are gone."

"Cousin, I would thank you for all the kindness I have received at this house," she said. "I have had much happiness here."

"Remember the happiness, and forget the sorrow, child," he said.

And then he drew her to him, and kissed her.

"There," he said bitterly, releasing her as he spoke, "I have no right to do it. Light and darkness have no fellowship."

He stood still, looking at her.

"When will you go?" he asked, after a long silence.

"To-morrow. There will be an opportunity."

"So soon?"

"It will be better. The heart will not protest the less for waiting."

She smiled sadly. The tears were very near.

"The desolation will be complete when you are gone," he said.

He stood aside to let her pass, and watched her as she went upstairs. And she, as she put together the simple possessions she had brought to the manor house, dropped among them a few hot tears.

Strivewell Thaxter's words had been peremptory.

"Your place is at home, daughter," he wrote. "Now that Wyntie Feljer is no more, you have naught to do at the manor house. Bid your cousin Geysbert farewell, and remind him from me that my home is open to him, and that a hearty welcome awaits him should he choose to visit it. And you — come at once. Your cousin cannot take it ill that you should so do. He is free to follow you, if he desire thus to do. I shall look for you speedily."

Geysbert read the words for himself on the morrow, before Probity left him.

"I thank him for the invitation," he said, but he made no promise of accepting it.

He held Probity's hands tightly as he stood with her on the boat, waiting for the signal to speak the last words. She was very pale and still.

"You have need to forgive us for bringing you to the manor house," he said. "This face is not the face of the cousin I met scarce a year ago. Our sorrows have pressed heavily upon you."

"I would not have had it otherwise," she replied. "Truly my heart is sorrowful, yet would I not go back to the days in which I had not lived at the manor house, nor known — my cousins."

He looked down upon her. Blind eyes do sometimes open. Geysbert's were undergoing a change. He bent over her and kissed her.

He watched until the boat was out of sight, and then returned to the empty manor house. It was more desolate than ever now that Probity was gone. He missed her quiet ministrations, and her unfailing sympathy. He

seemed more alone with his sin. The constant presence of that sin was eating away the covering of sophistry under which Geysbert had buried mercy and brotherly kindness. He could no longer stand righteously aloof and mete out retribution to his brother. Helmer's crime — supposing that he had committed it — was as nothing by the side of his own. And when he had ceased to magnify the crime, he found himself growing less confident about its committal. His mother had been certain that Helmer was innocent, and Aveline had never doubted it. Aveline's opinion had become a weighty argument on the side of acquittal. He did not believe his brother innocent, but he allowed the entrance of a doubt.

His remorse for his cruelty to Aveline was all-absorbing. He attended to the affairs of the estate in a half-hearted fashion, but his real life was lived in the memory of that night. If he could have found Helmer, he would at this time have befriended him — for her sake. There was, however, no trace of his brother. Even Kip had disappeared, gone back, in all probability, to his master. There was nothing to which he could show kindness because Aveline had cared for it, nothing he could do for her. It would have been a relief to do it, had there been anything to be done. The desire at last grew strong enough to find for itself an object.

"Ryseck," said Geysbert one morning, "I am going to New York to-morrow."

"To bring back Mistress Aveline?" asked Ryseck.

"To attend to my own business. It would be well if others would do the same," he replied sharply.

It was the middle of the summer, and there was on the estate much that required his attention, yet Geysbert was going to New York — on a mission for Aveline.

"I put it out of her power to do it," he said, not sparing himself. "It is but justice that I should do it for her."

He was going to the city to find out more about the

negro who had testified against Helmer. It would, in all probability, be of no avail, but he owed it to Aveline to attempt it. To Aveline, and to his mother. Remorse was taking broader ground. His heart was reproaching him for his mother's suffering.

He lost no time in seeking the owner of the negro.

"Cato?" was the answer. "You come too late to seek audience with him. The wretch is to be hanged to-morrow."

"Why, what crime has he committed?"

"He has but stabbed another negro in a fit of passion. But the master of the murdered slave was angry, and Cato is to get his deserts, more's the pity for me. He was, however, a dangerous rascal enough. He was capable of murdering me or anybody else in one of his rages, aye, even though he should die for it the next minute. He is about as well dead as alive, though it is a sad loss to me."

Geysbert changed colour. He felt his voice trembling.

"Did he ever have cause to bear a grudge against one Myndert Hooghland, the assistant of the Custom Officer here?"

The man laughed.

"Aye, that had he, if a bleeding back was reason enough. Young Myndert caught him about among some goods he was examining, and suspected him of theft. He gave the rascal the choice of a flogging or the mercy of the law. He chose the flogging rather than the branding-iron, and he got a fair taste of it. Myndert saw to that. Aye, he had cause enough for a grudge."

Geysbert turned away. His brain reeled. Helmer had not killed Myndert. He had been persecuting an innocent man. The ground was swept from beneath his feet. If Helmer were not guilty, his own action was

unjustifiable. Helmer's guilt was the sole excuse for all that had followed. And he had misjudged him. He thought he had reached the lowest depth of misery before he came to New York. But he was mistaken. It was possible for remorse to get a deeper hold of him. Conscience awoke more fully, and showed him himself. He did not wonder now that Aveline had scorned him. He scorned himself.

When he reached the prison, and confronted the negro, he was too full of shame to be hard on the poor wretch. Yet his face was stern as he charged him with the crime of the murder of Myndert Hooghland. Cato, frightened and broken down at the prospect of death on the morrow, was not hard to deal with. It did not take long to induce him to confess his guilt. In the presence of proper witnesses, and in due legal form, his confession was recorded.

"You will at least die more easily now that the sin of allowing an innocent man to suffer for your deed no longer rests on your soul," said Geysbert, as he looked back at the abject creature.

He passed out into the sunlight.

Helmer was cleared, was free to return to the manor house. Aye, but how could he face him?

CHAPTER XXXVIII

“**A**RENT HOOGHSLAND, your work has been taken out of your hands. It is two days since I saw Myndert’s murderer hanging dead, his crimes legally atoned for.”

Geysbert had come straight from his boat to Hooghland’s house. There was on his face a look the Dutchman had never seen there before.

“He is dead? Helmer Feljer has dangled by the neck in the sight of all men? Aye, but I would have given much to have witnessed such a sight.”

The bitter hatred that betrayed itself in every tone was more effective than the words. It caused Geysbert to realize the company he had joined when he ranged himself on the side of what he had been pleased to term justice.

“You are a fool,” he said, “as big a fool as I have been, and there is no bigger. The slave Cato murdered Myndert, in revenge for a flogging Myndert was the means of procuring for him.”

“It’s a lie!” shouted Arent. “But it is one that shall avail you nothing. Helmer Feljer shall die, and that as a murderer!”

“You rave,” replied Geysbert coldly. “The crime has been confessed, and a proper record of the confession made. My brother is as free to-day as he was before Myndert’s death. The copy of that confession is in my pocket. You can see it if you choose.”

“I won’t look at it. It’s a lie, every word of it.”

“Just as you please,” replied Geysbert. “I have no wish that you should read it.”

He strode away, never once looking back, and Arent Hooghland stood staring after him, the expression of his face gradually changing from savage passion to almost childish disappointment.

Geysbert went direct to the manor house, striding along beneath the July sun, his pace not in keeping with the heat of the day.

"Ryseck Schredel!" he called, in a voice that rang through the house.

"Bless us all, what is the matter now?" said Ryseck aloud. "That's Mr. Geysbert, and sure enough he sounds like no lamb."

She came into the hall.

"Aye, sir, you are back?" she said.

"Ryseck Schredel, it will occasion you no surprise for me to tell you that my brother is innocent — has been proved to be so," said Geysbert.

"No surprise that *you* should tell it?" replied Ryseck. "Nay, but where would you find a greater? The testimony of an enemy goes farther than the word of a friend to establish the character of the upright. If *you* say Helmer is innocent, verily it is so."

Geysbert's face was set. He gave no sign that the words stung him.

"So she's established his innocence, has she?" continued Ryseck. "I made a fairly good guess what the dear maid's errand was before she set out, but she's surely done her work apace. When is she coming back, or have you changed your mind on that point also, and given the poor lass her freedom?"

"If you are speaking of Miss Aveline, I did not meet her in New York," said Geysbert.

His hand grasped the back of a chair nervously. He was putting strong constraint upon himself. Ryseck's eyes travelled up and down that tall figure. This was not the Geysbert who had vowed he would bring Aveline

back. It was more than defeat that had been working here.

"Then she had done the business before you got there?" Ryseck's curiosity was eager.

"So far as I know she had no hand in it," replied Geysbert. "I went to New York to make inquiries in a new direction. They were successful, and the murderer was discovered. He is even now dead."

"And she had naught to do with it?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Then where is she? That's what I want to know."

Ryseck's sharp eyes were being kept at work. She did not spare them, nor Geysbert.

"That I cannot tell you," he said, and turned abruptly and left the hall.

"And Mr. Helmer? Is he to have his own now?"

The words went out into the hot air. Geysbert had gone. The last Ryseck saw of him he was hurrying down the hill, something in his gait causing even Ryseck a touch of compunction.

"The faster a man's been rushing downward, the heavier he's like to fall when he comes all of a sudden to the bottom," she said, "and I don't know that he feels his bruises the less for the pace at which he's been going. Mr. Geysbert's got a fall, and a hard one, and the ache of it is yet heavy in his soul."

The ache was heavier than Ryseck guessed. It had given him no rest since he learned that Helmer was innocent. Every vestige of excuse was swept away from him. Aveline had been in the right, nay, had been performing a duty that he himself should have done, and he had cruelly murdered her as a reward. That very first letter, that he had kept back from his mother, contained no lie, but the truth. Every subsequent act stood out in all its unwarrantable cruelty and treachery. On Helmer's guilt the right or wrong of each had

turned, or to him had seemed to turn. And Helmer was innocent. Geysbert stood without excuse to himself, and there is no more trying position. He had robbed his brother of his home, his mother's last weeks, almost of her love, and he had robbed him of Aveline. A long list of sins, truly, and the next step in the programme was the meeting with Helmer. Unless, indeed, he had absolutely filled up the measure of his iniquity, and Helmer's death also lay at his door. Aveline had said that his life depended on care. The shock of losing her, and the hurried move, were not likely to aid in the recovery of an almost dying man.

Ever since the confession of the negro these thoughts had been racing after one another through Geysbert's brain. Sleep had forsaken him as absolutely as peace. Never once since then had there been a moment's forgetfulness. Now Ryseck's last words rang in his ears.

"Is Helmer to have his own again?" Ah, there was another stab. Ryseck little knew how truly the manor house was Helmer's own. The memory of a legal document, found after all search for it was over, was an added burden on Geysbert's heart. That document was unopened. He had not broken the seal. He had but put the whole back into the place where he found it, sure that no other would ever see it now that he was master of the manor house.

The sun blazed down fiercely. Geysbert did not heed it. It was not as hot as his brain. He had been toiling in it all day, hurrying along in his canoe. He was not conscious of the heat, only of a burning pain in his head, and of a fierce ache at his heart.

He was under the shade of the trees now—in the shelter of the forest. But he strode along at a pace that forbade coolness, and the air was very still among the trees. An irresistible impulse was urging him on to the ravine beneath the ledge of rock. When he reached

it he stood looking in a dazed, stupid manner upward. He had forgotten his brother, forgotten the difficulties that surrounded him, and the disclosures that lay in the future. He was face to face again with his crowning act of cruelty. A great longing for and tenderness towards the girl against whom he had hardened his heart, swept over him.

"Fool, fool that I was — aye, from the very first!"

He spoke the words aloud in the bitterness of his soul. Then, hardly knowing what he did, he scrambled up where the rock was less steep, and dragged himself to the path above. With straining eyes he noted the rough, hard rock cropping up in the path.

"That's where I dragged her," he said. "Geysbert Feljer, hanging is too good for you!"

He took a few steps along the path.

The fire in his brain burned more fiercely. The pain at his heart had grown heavier. It seemed possessed of an iron hand that gripped at the life centre, and smothered the heart's beating. He staggered and stumbled.

"Aveline! Oh, Aveline!"

The words were only a whisper. They died away, and Geysbert lay upon the path, his head on one of those same rough stones over which he had not scrupled to drag the girl he had never for a moment ceased to love.

The sun went down, and the night breezes came. The moon peeped in among the trees, and shone on Geysbert's face, but it did not rouse him. Even the sound of voices failed to do that.

"The moon is accommodating. We shall have her light till morning, when we shall be well out of the way of these heretics."

The language was not the prevailing Dutch, nor the English of the more educated classes of the province.

The speaker, a young man of a lithe, light frame, was evidently at home in the forest. His companion made no answer. He was hurrying on ahead. Suddenly he stopped.

"Hasten, Jacques," he said, in the French tongue in which the other had spoken. "Here is surely an object for our charity."

"Charity be eschewed for once, father. "It is our place to save our necks."

"Nay, my son, but one under my vows cannot leave a fellow-man to die. Quick! Aid me in loosening his clothing. Truly he seems in a sad plight."

They knelt upon the path, and raised Geysbert's head. The elder forced brandy between his lips, and set to work to restore animation in a manner that betokened some skill. It was long before he was successful. When at last Geysbert opened his eyes, it was to look at him with a broad, unseeing stare.

"This is an unfortunate business," said the older man, after he had tried to elicit from his patient some information as to his destination, and his business here in the forest. "The time is passing, and if we be not far from human habitation by morning, we may see the inside of one of these English prisons."

"Aye, and that for a life sentence," replied the other. "Better leave the heretic where he lies. It is all any one of them merits at our hands."

"True, my son, but it is not merit that wins for any of us aid. To leave a fellow-creature here to die would be a sin which much penance would not atone for."

"Then what will you do? Wait here till morning, and let one of these Dutchmen have the satisfaction of clapping into prison a priest of the holy faith? They'll do it fast enough. Forget not the extent of the law. If found in this province, a priest may by any citizen be dragged before a Justice, to meet the merciful punish-

ment of perpetual imprisonment, with a prospect, should he break jail, of dying the death of a felon. Truly it is a pleasant anticipation. The fellow is not worth the risk."

"He is a human being."

"Aye, and a heretic. How much would he do for you if you were in need such as his? His very laws forbid him to succour you. Should he do so, he would merit and receive the reward of a heavy fine, with a three days' occupancy of the pillory thrown in. Little fear that he would risk such delights for the doubtful good of saving the life of a priest."

"Peace, my son. Such a spirit savours not of right. Let your arms wag instead of your tongue. We have need of some strong boughs. We will even construct a litter, to bear yonder poor wretch along with us. It is unsafe to approach Dutch habitations, but when we reach the native villages, we can send him back, provided there is life yet left in him."

They worked with a will. The morning light found them far away in the heart of the forest, where only an Indian or a well-trained woodsman could find his way. But the two pressed straight on, their goal an Indian village belonging to a tribe of the Five Nations.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE priest and his companion were running some risk in crossing the province of New York. Once among their Indian converts they would be safe, for it was not the policy of the English rulers to anger the Indians, and strong as was their jealousy and dislike towards the leaders of the French Catholics, their desire to propitiate their native friends was stronger. The two journeyed on, with very little rest, the younger grumbling loudly at the added burden of the sick man. He lay for the most part in a stupor, now and then rousing himself to mutter wild words.

"If his speech be anything but the raving of a madman, he is as sorely in need of spiritual succour as of bodily assistance," said the young man.

It was on the night before they reached their destination that Geysbert first showed signs of returning reason. Even then it was but clouded reason. The forest was still, the younger man asleep. The priest, much wearied, knelt by the litter. His eyes were lifted towards the stars. Absorbed in his devotions, he did not perceive that the sick man's gaze was fixed upon him. An impatient sigh called his attention back to earth, and he looked down into eyes that for the first time took cognizance of his presence and person.

"My son," he said, "can I do aught for you?"

"Son?" repeated Geysbert inquiringly. "The last who called me that was my mother — and I killed her."

"Such a sin lies heavy on the conscience, yet is there forgiveness even for such."

The priest spoke soothingly. He knew not how far the words had been the ravings of a disordered brain.

"Forgiveness? I don't know that I crave it. Forgetfulness would be more to the purpose. Can you offer me that?"

"Nay, my son. Memory is the scar left by the wound of sin. He who would escape it must avoid evil."

"Your advice comes late, and your words are bald," was the reply. "A scar? Nay, rather a deep wound, a fiery, hungry wound, eating down into an aching sore. 'Tis evident you know not of what you speak."

Geysbert moved impatiently. The priest laid his hand on the hot forehead.

"It is cool," said the young man, "as cool as the moonlight when it shone on her face."

"Whither were you bound when I found you upon the path by the deep chasm?" asked the priest, anxious, if possible, to know something more definite about his patient.

"The path up the mountain — near the ravine?" Geysbert spoke slowly and hesitatingly. "Whither was I bound? To destruction. It is my only destination now. And yet — I think — yes, I was to find my brother first. Then destruction will need no seeking."

"You were seeking your brother? What is his name?"

"Helmer Feljer."

"And where were you going to find him?"

"That I do not know, any more than I know where I am myself."

Geysbert spoke irritably, and the priest left his side. An uneasy sleep presently closed the restless eyes, and when they were next opened Geysbert was being carried through the forest. The party entered the Indian village at dawn, and the priest bestowed the sick man in his own dwelling. An hour later his companion entered hurriedly.

"Your pardon, father, for intruding upon you thus hastily," he said, "but I bring news. It will be possible to rid ourselves of yonder burden. Two of his race are here, nay, about to depart. They have as much right to charge themselves with him as had we."

"What do they here?" asked the priest.

"What do I here?" asked the other, laughing. "Verily the hunter's pelts are the attraction to both. They are traders, and they come to beguile our friends."

"I will ask them to visit me here," said the priest, "or possibly you will save me the labour, my good Jacques, since you seem to be already acquainted with them."

The young Frenchman's information was of a very partial nature. He had seen two white men in the village, and had learned that certain Indians were meditating a journey to Albany as a result of their visit. All beyond this was inference. He did not know that the coming of himself and his companion had troubled the mind of one of the strangers, and that preparations for departure were being hastened. To Helmer Feljer the presence of the Frenchmen suggested danger, and his anxiety communicated itself to Fulke. As yet, Aveline knew nothing of the new arrivals.

The three had been in the Indian village long enough for Helmer to regain some of his former strength. Fulke was in haste to leave, but Aveline would not hear of deserting her patient until he had completely recovered. The presence of the French priest brought matters to a sudden crisis. Helmer made active preparations for taking again to his forest life, and Fulke was only too glad to go back to Albany.

It was Helmer whom Jacques encountered when he went out to deliver his friend's message, and, much against his will, the young man was persuaded to enter the dwelling.

"My friend, I have ventured to send for you to ask your good offices for one of your countrymen," said the priest. "Yonder lies a sick man, one of your race. Should you be going back by boat, it would be a charity to carry him along. We found him in the woods, and for divers reasons could not return him to his friends."

Helmer approached the bed. The sleeping man moved uneasily. The priest saw his visitor stop, his face growing white and rigid. For a minute neither spoke.

"You know him?" said the priest at last.

"Yes, I know him."

The Frenchman looked from one to the other.

"You have known him long," he said. "The same mother called both of you son."

Helmer turned to him quickly.

"You are right," he said. "He is my brother. I will take the burden off your hands. But I would ask that when he shall awake we may be alone."

"It shall be as you say," was the answer.

But instead of leaving the hut, the priest drew yet nearer to his visitor, laying his hand on the young man's arm.

"He who would hope to receive mercy must show himself merciful," he said.

Helmer looked at him inquiringly.

"What do you know of him, or me?" he asked.

"Little," was the reply. "But I know the human heart. It needs oft to take counsel with mercy, lest it fail to remember that justice and revenge at times are like of face."

"I will remember that he is sick," said Helmer. "As for mercy, it may not always take precedence of justice."

For many minutes the little cabin was very still. Helmer was alone with his brother. He stood looking upon Geysbert's face. Something in that face softened the

voice of justice. It was so worn and weary and full of suffering. Suddenly the sick man's lips moved.

"Aveline!" he said.

The pain and remorse and longing in the one word struck home to Helmer's heart. He realized how madly Geysbert had loved. He bent over his brother.

"Geysbert," he said gently.

Geysbert opened his eyes. For a moment there was in them a look of recognition, then it changed to terror. He put up his hand, as if to ward off a blow.

"You have found me," he said. "It was I who was to find you — to find you, and tell you. I killed her."

He said it quietly, but with an intensity of horror that communicated itself to Helmer.

"You killed her?"

"Yes — murdered her. She was hurled down into the ravine — among the rocks. I saw the blood in great clots."

Violent trembling seized him. He clutched Helmer's hand.

"You have a right to avenge her," he said. "She belonged to you, not to me. I said you had no right to her, but you had. She was right, and you were right, and my mother was right. I alone was a fool."

"Yes, you were that."

The bitterness had not all gone from Helmer's voice, though its tone was not hard.

"Do you think I have not learned it? I would give my life, yes, by inches, to undo my work. It can never be undone. Listen! I dragged her behind my horse, bound and helpless. Yes, I cruelly dragged her — Aveline — over the rough rocks, and I saw her white face and would not stop. I did not care, until I heard her cry as she went over into the ravine. I was drunk then — I have been mad since."

"And now? You are sorry for your violence?"

Helmer asked the question very distinctly. He wanted the words to reach the fevered brain.

"Sorry!" Geysbert laughed fiercely. "Do you know what hell is? I do. I've been there ever since that night. I shall never be anywhere else. But there's deeper torment, even in hell," he continued, "and it came to me. If there be a deeper still, I suppose it will come too. Yes, it came when the slave Cato confessed his crime, and I knew that it was my own mad jealousy, and that alone, that had made a fool of me. I was not a murderer only, but a murderer without excuse. You were innocent. I had broken my mother's heart, and driven you from home, and murdered her, and all to uphold a lie. I had at least had a shred of excuse for my vindictiveness. Now there was none."

"And you were convinced of my innocence?"

"Aye, *I* was convinced. There was no gainsaying it. The poor wretch confessed his crime before he died. You are a free man—free to take your revenge."

"Hush," said Helmer gently. "I want no revenge. I would but be sure that you honestly repent of your cruelty to her."

"Repent!" replied Geysbert, and his voice rose sharply. "What is the use of repentance? Will it bring her back? Will it still the sound of that cry, and take away the memory of that rope as it hung by one strand over the black chasm? Will repentance do that?"

Again the trembling seized him. Helmer made no answer. He stood looking down upon him. Then he forcibly disengaged his hand, and left the sick man alone.

It was not long before he returned, not long enough for that fit of trembling to have ceased. The hands that lay upon the bed-clothes shook painfully. A sob or

two came from between the quivering lips. Geysbert did not look round when two figures entered the door.

"Go to him," whispered Helmer, and Aveline advanced slowly. Her face was hard and cold. Memories of the old Geysbert were to the front. Her eye fell on that quivering, sorrowful, broken Geysbert, and the hardness began to yield. Yet there was enough sternness left to account for the cry which broke from Geysbert's lips.

"Aveline!" he gasped. "You have come in vengeance." Yet he stretched out his hands towards her. "I am ready to meet the judgment I have merited," he said. "Helmer will avenge you, and I will not resist. Your eyes are full of reproach. Yet even thus I would rather see you than lose you forever. I have seen you ever since, but not like this. That was your white, frightened face — this — is an avenging face."

"Nay, dear Geysbert, it is a forgiving face."

She bent over him, and took his hand in her own. There were tears in her eyes. He felt the warm touch of her fingers, and recoiled. Once more the trembling increased. His teeth chattered.

"What is it?" he said. "Oh, it cannot be —"

He looked towards Helmer pitifully.

"It is Aveline herself," said his brother tenderly. "See, her hands are touching yours. They are warm. You did not kill her, though it might well have been as you feared."

He lay looking from one to the other. Slowly the trembling lessened.

"Repentance instead of despair," he said at last. Then he turned to Aveline. "In years to come it may be that you will learn to forgive," he said. "I will wait."

She bent over and kissed him.

"Dear brother Geysbert," she said, "you need not wait. Let us be one again, in the way madam wished."

"You forgive me?" he asked.

"Fully," replied Aveline.

"But Helmer cannot forgive. He loves you too well. I could not forgive such wrong to one I loved as I love you."

Helmer gently removed Aveline's hand from Geysbert's.

"Geysbert, dear old brother," he said, "can we begin fairly now? I think I know better to-day than ever I did before, what I am asking. But I ask it. Your love for her has been strong enough to lead you to make her miserable. Is it strong enough to constrain you to make her happy?"

Geysbert hesitated. Then his hand slowly travelled towards the two which lay so near to each other. Drops of perspiration broke out on his forehead.

"Take her, Helmer," he said. "I know now that she could never have been for me. I was too utterly unworthy of her."

He brought the two hands together. They both closed over his own.

Later Geysbert tried to tell of the missing will, and of his own culpability in hiding it again, but Helmer stopped him.

"The past is done with," he said. "When we go back we will find the will together."

It took some persuasion to prevent Fulke from having some retributive words with Geysbert.

"You may all be as soft-hearted as you please," he said. "It is my place to look after Aveline. On one point I am determined. She goes out of my care no more until she is definitely given into the care of one who has more right to her."

"And how soon may that be?" asked Helmer eagerly.

"Not before the autumn, at least. You must have time

to arrange matters at the manor house, and to test Geysbert's temper. I have got my sister back, and I will risk her life and happiness no more. And another thing. She must be legally free before she takes on herself a new bondage."

"It would have been my first care in any case," said Helmer.

Two days later the party broke up, Helmer and Geysbert to return to the manor house, as soon as the latter was sufficiently recovered to travel, and Aveline and Fulke, with Fulke's negroes, to go to Albany. The journey by boat was not a hard one, as had been the first part of that former journey through the forest, before the point was reached where Fulke had left his attendants. Aveline had time for thought, and her thoughts were glad ones. Helmer was cleared, and the manor house his own.

"If only dear madam had lived to see it all," she said regretfully.

Warmer tints were touching the forest when Aveline came back to the manor house, no longer in the character of Aveline Nevard, but as the young Madam Feljer. Ryseck Schredel stood in the hall to welcome her.

"I told you I would come back, Ryseck," said Aveline, — and she passed by the outstretched hand, and laughed as she kissed the honest Dutch face, — "and here I am."

"Aye, my dear, here you are, and right glad I am to set eyes on you again," said Ryseck. "I never doubted that you'd be back when your work was accomplished."

Ryseck had little to say in those days.

"When there are no robbers around, the watch dog may keep his mouth shut," she remarked to Philip. "It's an ill-bred cur that growls at friend and foe alike."

On this principle Ryseck's mouth had been shut from

the day when Arent Hooghland, disappointed and crest-fallen, had decided that there was land around Esopus that would prove more to his liking than any on the Feljer estate, and when, with Helmer's full consent, all obligations between them were cancelled, and Arent looked his last on the house he had helped to make desolate. With him departed all need — even in Ryseck's estimation — of a watch dog at the manor house.

It was Geysbert himself who brought the missing will to Aveline, and that on the evening of her return to the manor house. He spread it open on the table.

"There is one clause here that you must read," he said.

He put his finger at the place, and while she read, his gaze never left her face. She lifted her eyes at last, and, startled as they were, they met his.

"It makes me a bigger brute than ever, doesn't it?" he said, and there was an unusual hoarseness in his voice.

"It makes me happier than ever," replied Aveline.

"What is it?" asked Fulke, from the other side of the big room. Fulke was very jealous for Aveline now, determined, in this the beginning of a new life for her, to do his duty rigorously as guardian in the place of Sir Julian. He and Helmer crossed to Geysbert's side.

"It is a clause in my mother's will," said Geysbert.

"And it explains why I could not keep my promise about a certain legal matter relating to Aveline," said Helmer.

He held out his hand for the will, but Geysbert retained it. It was he who read the words: "To my dear daughter Aveline I leave the *knowledge* of her freedom. The actual freedom has been hers for many months, having been duly and legally recorded before her journey with me to New York. Whereas she was once, as a matter of form, bound to me for a period of

five years, which form was only maintained as a legal means of asserting my guardianship over her, she was at that time set at liberty, that not even a form of bondage might remain, seeing I owe to her many times over the small sum advanced originally on her behalf, having received from her hand services many and varied."

Geysbert's voice was not quite steady as he finished the words. His hand dropped to his side. He was looking at Aveline again.

"And with that there I was fool enough to claim to be — your master," he said.

"You did not know how presumptuous you were," she replied, smiling.

CHAPTER XL

THE window was open wide, and Sir Julian stood with his back to it, in precisely the same attitude in which he had stood more than four years before, when he and Lady Betty had a contention—not quite amicable—about the future of the boy and girl who did not occupy the same position relatively in the hearts of the two combatants. But that was in the library of the Great House, whereas, to-day, the street to which Sir Julian's back was turned, was part of the business centre of that pushing, struggling province to which Fulke's aspirations had at that time longingly turned.

The determination to see his brother's "little girl" once more, and to assure himself of her welfare, had caused Sir Julian to take a step which reduced his neighbours to a state of open-eyed amazement.

"I have a desire to see the New World for myself," Sir Julian said, "for truly it seems no howling waste, now that the letters of my nephew and niece have rendered me familiar with its details. I would even judge of it first hand."

"Going to the colonies are you?" quoth Lady Betty. "And pray how soon? Not but that the time which would suffice for you to bestow your possessions in a good oaken chest would avail for my preparations also. Yet will it be necessary to give the maids a little wholesome advice before I leave them, and that, I'll wager, will take more than a day or two."

Sir Julian looked at her with surprise. She answered the look, for there was nothing else to answer.

"I don't know but I have taken as much stock in the boy as you have in the girl," she said. "I, too, have

perchance suddenly grown curious about the New World."

In truth neither Sir Julian nor Lady Betty had felt quite easy during these years. When the first intimation of her bondage came to her, Aveline had said that Sir Julian must never know. To that determination she strictly adhered, and Fulke was little likely to tell the story of his own failure. To Sir Julian came letters telling of a home provided for Aveline in one of the best families of the land, where her training in the higher forms of household duties would be carried on as carefully as if still in Lady Betty's own hands. Fulke, on his part, enlarged on the dangers of a trader's life, and explained that by the present arrangement his sister escaped much loneliness during his long expeditions. At first each tried to put into the letters more hopefulness than was really felt, but as time went on, the tone of the communications changed. That which she had before introduced by force, crept into Aveline's letters now unnoticed, being the outward sign of a satisfied heart. Fulke's news also was full of notes of success. Sir Julian marked the change, and smiled over it.

"Poor little maid," he said, "the heart aches are lessening, and the heart joys appearing."

When he first learned of Aveline's sojourn at the manor house, Sir Julian wrote to Madam Feljer, and received a characteristic reply. Madam had by this time come to appreciate the maiden of whom she had unexpectedly gained possession, and she knew of Aveline's desire to shield her brother. Thus it was that no hint of danger reached Sir Julian. Yet he was not easy. This was not the life he had anticipated for Aveline, neither would it put upon Fulke the responsibility his uncle desired for him. He could never think of Aveline without a twinge of compunction. Her banishment, as Sir Julian termed it, was a standing subject of

dispute between him and Lady Betty. Even the news of Aveline's marriage did not quite set Sir Julian's mind at rest, though it set Lady Betty triumphing over him. How was he to know that the child had been given a fair chance to learn her own mind? And this young man? What was to prove that he was worthy of her? Sir Julian had a little British exclusiveness in his composition, and he was not prepared at once to echo Fulke's expressions of satisfaction.

The desire to see for himself grew steadily. He wanted to set his mind at rest. At last that desire resolved itself into action. Sir Julian and Lady Betty crossed the water, and Aveline, in a flutter of happiness, welcomed them to her New York home. For Helmer had purchased a house in the city, one of modest dimensions compared with the elaborate structure that was not yet quite completed on Geysbert's property outside the town.

"I am not going to hide you forever at the manor house," Helmer said. "I want the world to envy me my treasure."

There was something in Sir Julian's attitude to-day that acted like a challenge on Lady Betty. Just so he had stood many a time, while he argued that Aveline had been sacrificed for her brother. The good lady's eyes passed those broad shoulders, and through the corner of the window caught a glimpse of a young man without.

"There, now!" she cried triumphantly. "It's taken four years to answer your question fully, but where will you find a better answer than that? 'What'll the lad make?' croaked you, on the day I urged the wisdom of giving him another chance. Aye, what? He was but in the puppy stage then. There's your answer. What *has* he made? Do you want a finer specimen of young manhood than that?"

Sir Julian turned his head. Fulke stood in the street, looking earnestly in the direction in which, but a minute before, a group of sailors had passed, most of them a little less accountable for their actions, and a little more dangerous to the community, than before they had sought to quench their thirst and raise their spirits by stronger drinks than Nature herself provided. Sir Julian's eye rested on the young man, and his face softened.

"You are right," he said. "The lad has greatly changed. It is even possible that the end has justified the means, yet truly, had I known the various steps from the beginning, the first had never been taken."

"Steps, forsooth! And who's going to sit down and whine over every unlucky step, when he's already well up the hill of success?"

"Who, indeed?" replied Sir Julian. "Not the one on whom the brunt of those missteps came, surely. You may wager she's never counted up the cost of each one. And you may be fairly sure she reckons the price as none too high for the result gained — the making of a man of — well, one who was like to stay over-long in that same puppy stage. A worthy object enough to out-weigh any sacrifice, eh?"

The rich musical voice ceased. Sir Julian was not waiting for an answer. His thoughts had passed beyond Lady Betty to the point from which her words had called him a minute or two ago. For to-day Sir Julian understood, as he had not done before, just what were the steps which had led to Fulke's present position and character. The older man was not inclined to deny that the voluntary putting of him in possession of those facts was in itself sufficient proof that the Fulke of London days had disappeared. The young man who sought an opportunity to explain to Aveline's guardian how completely he had failed in the trust delegated to him, was

not the Fulke who had confidently asserted his integrity in the library at Eastenholme. He made no excuses for himself. He allowed the facts to stand out in all their bare unpleasantness.

Beginning at the moment when he left Eastenholme, he carried his hearer through those weeks in London, when the battle was fought and lost, and filled in the story of the voyage across the sea, ending with his own frantic journey to Albany, and the leaving of Aveline to meet the emergency alone. His voice lost its steadiness as he came to that day when Aveline too embarked upon a river boat, and as he told of her lonely wandering in the storm and darkness. There his confession stopped. He had nothing to say about more recent dangers. That was another's story, and Aveline had decreed that it should never be told. It was his own failure of trust with which he had to do, and he kept to that.

"I deemed it but fair to render you an account of my stewardship, sir," he said. "For long my unpardonable folly caused me fear and shame — fear for her, and shame for myself. At present nothing but the shame remains. She has now a better protector than myself."

"Which is saying but little for the young man, her husband," said Sir Julian drily.

Fulke made no answer. He had not sought this interview without being prepared for Sir Julian's reproaches. He knew that that mellow voice could say cutting things, and he braced himself to listen. They would not be harder than he deserved.

There came a long silence after he had done speaking.

"Well, we may consider ourselves failures, disgraceful and pitiable failures, so far as our guardianship is concerned," said Sir Julian at last. "The next time I let a duty of my own slip into other hands, it will take a stronger incentive than the buying of one life at the expense of another — and better. However, we *have*

failed, both of us. We may as well acknowledge our failure to one another, and start afresh."

He held out his hand to his nephew.

"You have at least had the sense to make something out of the life she gave herself for," he said.

Now his eyes rested kindly on the young man as he stood below the window.

"If you have come down out of the clouds, I would suggest the closing of that window." Lady Betty's voice broke in on his thoughts. "Those drunken sailors are returning, and their words and songs are shocking to decent ears. I wonder what the governor can be thinking of not to put such pestilent fellows in the pillory. Truly they should be taught a lesson."

The sailors were almost opposite the window when Sir Julian moved hastily to close it.

"Surely you are right," he said. "That they have to-day come into port with a captured Spanish war-ship is no excuse for such ribald talk, and such offensive behaviour. Yet it is best, perhaps, to let them go their way. The heat of wine is in their brains, and has driven out what sense was once there."

The sailors looked up towards the window as they passed, and seeing Sir Julian and Lady Betty standing before it, one of them gave utterance to an expression which called forth loud shouts from his fellows. Fulke, who had thought it prudent to enter the house before they reached it, heard the remark, and his eyes flashed. He took a step forward, and then drew back again. It was folly single-handed to attack such a company. He waited until they had passed, and then stepped from the door.

"This is business for the sheriff," he said, as Sir Julian opened the window to speak to him. "That the men are elated with their success is not sufficient reason for tolerating such behaviour as this. I go to acquaint him with their conduct and condition."

CHAPTER XLI

“**T**RULY man’s virtues are pitiably limited in their scope. That yonder sailors should fight like heroes against their country’s enemies, and then be weakly led captive by their own appetites until the land they have so lately served has reason to be ashamed and confounded because of them, is a strange contradiction.”

It was the same rhythmical voice in which Probity had greeted her aunt three years before. The undertone of sadness had not left it, but had rather grown more apparent. Probity herself was changed, yet she was the same Probity. Mouth and eyes were less at variance than of old. The unity had not been accomplished at the expense of the eyes; *they* had more than held their own. It was not a less beautiful face, but it was softer and more tenderly human than the one into which Geysbert had looked when he stood on the boat and knew that with Probity his last comfort was departing from the manor house.

Geysbert had never acted upon Strivewell Thaxter’s suggestion, and followed his cousin to her New England home. But he had not forgotten her. The place she had occupied did not fill up. The memory of the eyes that had looked into his had not faded. Probity had held towards him a unique relationship. Only she, among those who now freely gave him a place in their hearts, had loved him while yet he was determinately sinning. Aveline had scorned him. Helmer had been bitterly angry. But Probity, while not for a moment cloaking his sin, rather while acknowledging it more fully than did any other, had yet kept her heart open

towards him. So far from casting him off, she had taken his sin on her own soul.

His memory of her was tender, but he did not seek her. He had enough to do to live down the passion which had taken possession of him. He never again grudged Helmer his happiness. Once and forever he had put down with a strong hand that craving of his heart. He owned his punishment just. Not only must Aveline belong to Helmer, but he could never stand before her other than as a guilty man. She had forgiven, very fully and completely. She had even come to see that she had often been hard on Geysbert. But between him and her — on his side, not on hers — was the barrier of his own act. When his heart cried out for the love it craved, he put that act before it. Because it had sinned, it must suffer, and it had no right to cry out beneath the suffering. Geysbert was a proud man, but towards Aveline his pride was humbled. He never allowed it place again.

As time went on, the pain became less acute. It was pain still, but it had grown dull. He could look on Helmer's gladness without that violent effort to crush his own passion. The sight of Aveline did not make his heart beat as irregularly as it had done at first. There was no such disturbance of the heart when he thought of Probity, but there was an increasing tenderness. There was no barrier between her and him. When first she heard of Aveline's return, she wrote him a letter which was so like Probity that his eyes grew dim as he read it. It was full of compunction for having misjudged him, and of humility because her confidence in her own judgment had led her astray. In answer to that letter Geysbert sent to her the plain unvarnished tale of his night ride and its consequences. It cannot be denied that the loving words of warning and thankfulness which came in response were balm to

his wound. Probity's love shone through every word. Where all the rest gave pity and forgiveness, she offered an unbroken, uninterrupted affection. She was the same Probity who first persistently believed in him, and then risked her own peace for him. He felt sure of her, and the assurance was healing. Even from the beginning the world would have been more desolate to Geysbert if there had not been the knowledge of Probity — away from him, living a life altogether apart from the remorse of his sorrowful days—yet loyal to him, true in the love that in her heart would never waver.

He said very little about his cousin, and presently he went away to New York to superintend the building of his house, and to engage in certain trading operations in connection with other lands. But in Aveline's mind a plan had been maturing, and when she and Helmer came to the city, she put that plan into action. The result of it was — Probity, here in New York.

Probity had risen at Aveline's entrance. Her arms were encircling a diminutive specimen of humanity, Aveline's little one, the baby Julian. That small tyrant had taken to Probity at once. He must surely have divined the steadfast strength of the heart that beat close to his tiny head as he pillowed it on her bosom, for he rested there contented. He was a baby of some discernment. He honoured Sir Julian with a smile, and condescended to clutch a finger held out to him, but he stoutly refused to have anything to do with Lady Betty. He puckered up his face into a frown, and turned his head perversely from her.

"A little wild Indian, and nothing better," said Lady Betty wrathfully.

But about Probity his mind was made up. He even refrained from manifesting any undue preference for Aveline's arms, which were held out to him as she

entered. She carried him to the window, and stood looking out, her face very glad and satisfied.

"You are right," she said. "These sailors are in a disgraceful state. They are in a dangerous state, too," she added, as she noted the reckless way in which they accosted a passer-by.

"Is not yonder the sheriff coming with your brother?" said Probity. "I trust the good man will be discreet, for truly these privateersmen are altogether too ready to resort to blows."

It would have required some discretion to have dealt with those sailors. They were the crew of a noted privateer, and accounted themselves heroes. Their contest with the Spaniards had been a fierce one, and their elation was in proportion to the hardness of the fight. Every other feeling was swallowed up in drunken pride, and they thought themselves more than a match for the whole city of New York. The sheriff received but scant courtesy at their hands. Sir Julian, standing by the lower window, grew so excited and indignant that he had almost precipitated himself into the midst of the fray. Lady Betty, however, was on hand. She took a firm grip of his coat.

"Sit you down, and keep calm," she said. "You journeyed hither to see the colonies. Now look at them. Truly you did not cross the sea to come to fisticuffs with offscouring such as yon."

Fulke and one or two passers-by had rallied to the assistance of the sheriff, but the sailors outnumbered them. There was a short scuffle, in which the defenders of the law had so much the worst of it that the sheriff, much bruised and battered, took to his heels, and ran towards his own house, followed by the noisy crew, who for the time left their other enemies unmolested, and gave their whole attention to the pursuit.

"Verily the good man's life is in danger," said Lady

Betty. "The governor will have to send soldiers to the rescue. The majesty of the law needs upholding. Such pestiferous fellows should feel the lash."

"Ah, he has reached his own threshold," cried Sir Julian, as the sheriff gained the shelter of his doorway, and paused for a moment to hurl the nearest adversary to the ground.

A volley of oaths told that he had succeeded in putting a strong door between himself and the rioters. The sounds came somewhat softened by distance, though the sheriff's house was in full sight. Shouts of raillery, and language horrible enough to arouse the anger of all who heard it, followed. The sailors set themselves to wreak their vengeance on this last defeated foe, and recklessly attempted to batter and break their way into the house. Several citizens sallied out to attempt a rescue, only to be driven back ignominiously. The sailors were now thoroughly excited. So also were the townspeople, Fulke among the number.

"I am going to the fort," he announced. "This is too much to stand."

"They'll have the door down, I'll wager, unless the soldiers are soon on the scene," said Lady Betty, some time later.

"Here come men wearing the queen's uniform," responded Sir Julian. "Now, perchance, these rascals will get their deserts."

"Nay, there are but two of them. Does the commander of the fort think that each man is four-handed, that he sends so few?" said Lady Betty wrathfully. "It is no child's play to quell such a riot, and teach the scoundrels their place."

"They wear the dress of army officers," said Sir Julian. "The miscreants will not dare to do other than obey them."

"That sounds like obedience, truly!" retorted Lady

Betty sarcastically, as a confused volume of sound reached the listeners.

At sight of the officers some of the sailors shouted, some swore, and there were those who screamed in their fury. They turned their attention from the sheriff's house, and hurled themselves on these new foes. If they thought to put them to flight as quickly as they had dispersed their former assailants, they found themselves mistaken. The officers drew their swords, and used them too. The sailors closed about them. For a few minutes the confusion was too great for any to tell on which side victory was declaring itself. Then the sympathizers of the sheriff bore quickly away a motionless figure. The cry was raised, "They have killed a queen's officer!" There was but one soldier fighting now.

The riot was growing serious, and the citizens anxious. Suddenly, in a momentary lull in the storm, there was heard the sound of many feet, advancing rapidly, and a body of soldiers appeared, coming at a run towards the scene of strife. Then there rose a shout of triumph from the weaker side, and Lady Betty, in her excitement, brought her hand down heavily on a table near by.

"Now they will get their deserts! Ah, they are already having a taste of it. The fine fellows are laying to with a will. One of the rascals has fallen. They are trampling him under foot, and full well he deserves it. There will soon be others to keep him company."

The rioters surged and wavered, now advancing, now retreating. It was a hand to hand fight, but it was soon apparent that the sailors were having the worst of it. They fought desperately, but bit by bit they were driven back. The sheriff's house was clear of them; they had retreated farther down the street. But before the door the ground was spattered with blood, and a

blood-stained human form, that now and again writhed in pain, was left as a witness to the defeat of the sailors.

Aveline stood behind Lady Betty and Sir Julian, and every eye was strained to follow the combat. Objects nearer home were overlooked in the excitement of the fight. That was why none of the three noticed the girl who went swiftly past the window, and who never stopped until she stood over the fallen sailor, whose moans sounded plainer to her than all the shouts of the combatants. The poor wretch was sorely wounded, and his life blood wetted the stones.

"My friend, can I do aught to help you?"

Probity knelt upon the blood-stained stones, and gently lifted the sailor's head. She poured water from a bottle she had brought, and let a few drops trickle from her hand on to the tightly closed lips. She pressed her cool, wet hand on the dying man's forehead. He looked up at her, and moaned again.

"My friend," she said, "I would gladly help you, but I fear there is little that can be done. There is only One who can aid you now, and to Him, I am afraid, you have been little accustomed to turning. Yet would I urge you now to seek Him. You have not long to live in this world — it may possibly not be too late to prepare for the next."

The sailor fixed his eyes on her, and roused himself to give utterance to an oath. The girl looked upon him sorrowfully.

"Surely the cords of sin are strong, and they cut deep into the heart. It can in no wise free itself," she said.

But she took out her handkerchief, and laid it, wet and cool, on his forehead. Just then the fortunes of war for the moment turned. The soldiers gave way, and the tide of battle moved once more up the street. Probity saw the danger. Bending thus over the wounded sailor, she would, almost of a certainty, be trampled

upon. But if she left him, the small remnant of life would be trodden out. The few minutes given to him to prepare for another world would be snatched away. She stood up and exerted all her strength to draw him out of the line of conflict. But he was a heavy man, and she made small headway. On came the combatants, the soldiers yielding ground slowly. Shouts, and oaths, and the trampling of feet, and the clashing of steel, were in her ears. Then she was hurled to the ground, but as she fell she yet endeavoured to shield the poor wretch she had tried to succour. She felt the touch of a soldier's heavy heel, and then lay stunned. It was a man's voice that roused her. It sounded clear above the tumult.

"Probity! Dear Probity!"

With strong arm Geysbert thrust the nearest strugglers aside.

"Stand back!" he cried. "You are trampling on a woman."

The course of the pushing, fighting crowd was diverted, and Geysbert bent over the girl.

"Probity!" he said. "Have I lost you too?"

He lifted her from the ground. Her face was bruised by the heel of the soldier. He did not stop to see whether or not the sailor still lived. He carried Probity swiftly towards the house where Aveline and Sir Julian and Lady Betty were now waiting, an excited group, without the door.

"Is she much hurt?" asked Aveline.

The look he gave her confirmed a suspicion that had long been growing in her mind.

"They trampled on her," he said, and his voice trembled.

He carried her up to the room where she had stood to watch the fray. Her eyelids had never stirred since that first moment when his voice roused her. But when

he bent over the white face, disfigured now with the blue mark made by the soldier's heel, he suddenly stooped and kissed her. Then her eyes opened, and a faint wave of colour swept over her face. Nobody was there except Aveline, and a moment later Aveline was not there either.

"Probity, the world grew very dark when I thought you were going from me," he said.

She tried to smile, but her lips quivered.

It must have been fully ten minutes before Aveline returned, with much apparently unnecessary bustle, and with such restoratives as seemed most useful. That ten minutes had been spent in vigorous efforts to keep Lady Betty out of the room. Now the good lady followed close at her heels.

"Hoity-toity!" she said. "Is this how you attend to the wounds of an injured girl?"

Geysbert stood leaning over Probity, one hand clasp- ing the blood-stained fingers that had ministered to the sailor, and the other smoothing the hair from her fore- head. He laughed as he turned to Lady Betty.

"There is more than one way of accomplishing the same end," he said.

It was later in the same day. The dying sailor had been removed, and his companions driven off. Even the blood had been washed from the street. But the excitement had not subsided. All New York was roused. An officer had been killed, and the law defied. It was the subject of talk in every house. More espe- cially was it the subject of talk in the house where Aveline sat dispensing tea from a tiny teapot, a little globular vessel that held scarcely more than a pint. It cannot be denied that Aveline was a trifle proud of her position to-day, or that she displayed the gold tea- service — Helmer's gift — with something like triumph. Lady Betty's eyes were critical, but even Lady Betty

could not find aught to say against Helmer, or Helmer's care of herself. He was talking to Sir Julian now, showing himself very attentive to the older man, but Sir Julian did not fail to notice that any movement on Aveline's part drew his eyes towards her with a watchful care. The mind of Aveline's guardian was already at peace with respect to his ward.

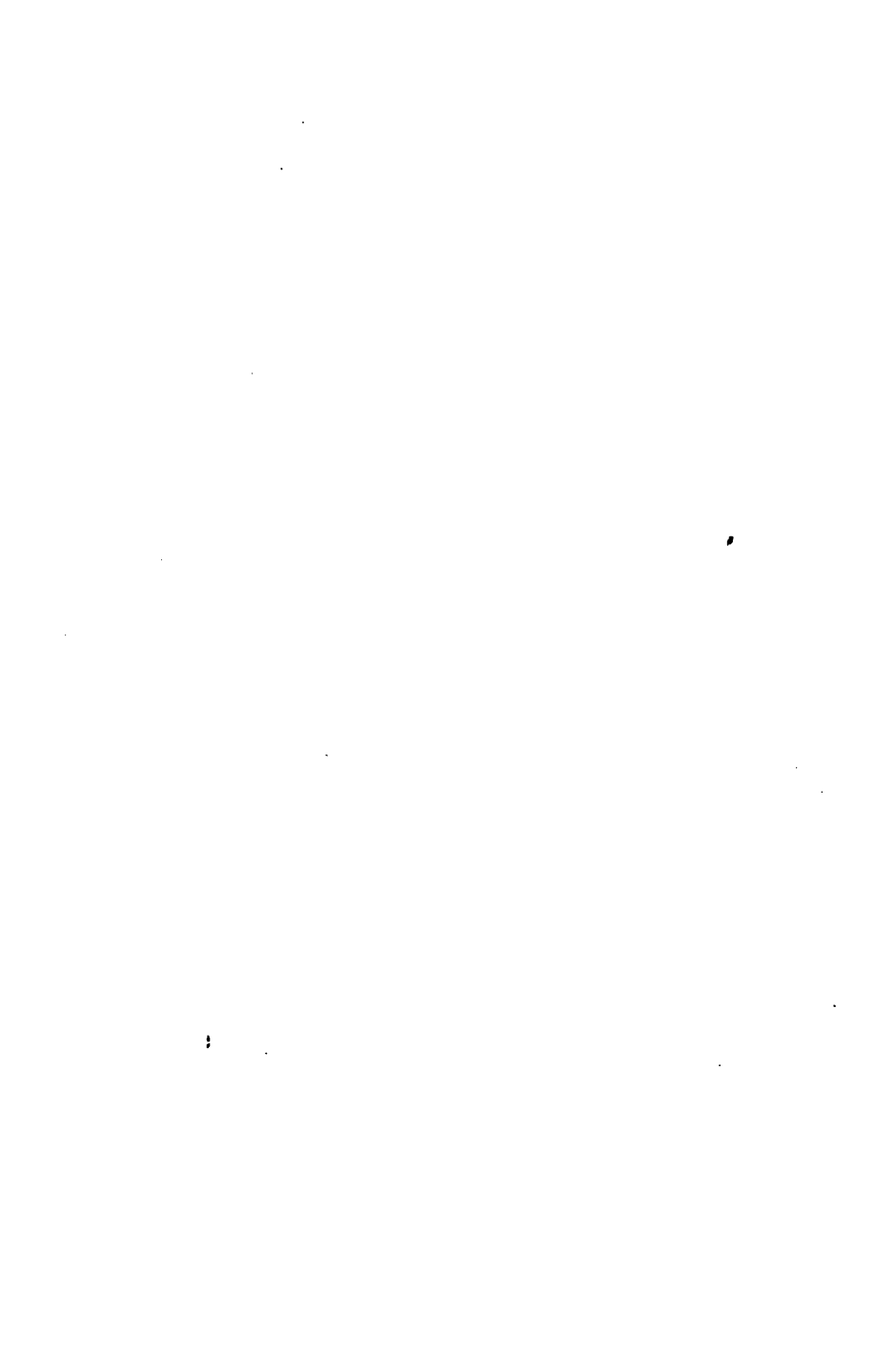
Lady Betty complacently sipped her tea from the miniature cup that held no more than a gill, and looked from her niece to the spot where Probit, very white and shaken, was being carefully waited upon by Geysbert. Then she allowed her gaze to travel upward towards Fulke, who, tall and manly, was devoting himself to her.

"You might have done worse than cross the water," she said.

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